

Ready and Watching
Sunday November 28, 2021
Advent I

Luke 21:25-36

When you hear this passage from Luke's gospel, how do you feel? What comes to mind? When you consider that this season of Advent reminds us of Christ's return, how do you approach that? Is it great good news, or is it troubling and fearful, or is there a mixture of both?

Unlike the secular New Year, Christian advent celebrations are not the time for drinking, fireworks, sparkly dresses or midnight kisses. Advent is, instead, a season of repentance, fasting, waiting, and longing. It is no wonder that few Christians actually observe advent, with descriptors like those: after all, repentance and fasting are just so gloomy. They don't market well either.

So the world around us wants us to shop til we drop. The commercials show us eating an abundance throughout this season – so much for fasting. We're to celebrate, party, get dressed up – so much for repentance in sack cloth and ashes. The new trend in commercials tell us to treat ourselves first – get yourself what you really want – no need to wait – and any sense of longing should really be limited to a longing for newest smart phone.

In church we are sometimes criticized by well-meaning folks who like to sing an abundance of Christmas carols at this time of the year – celebrate the holy days. But the church sings songs in minor keys – advent hymns filled with words of hope, not fulfillment, longing for the fullness of Jesus' reign, yearning for the day when peace will come to all the world. We sing and speak about repentance – about

being ready for the day of our Lord's return. We reflect and remember that one day our Lord will return in glory – like light dawning over a distant hill.

Christmas carols will come – the celebration will begin – but not until we have prepared ourselves – cleaned house – made room for the great glad joy that is coming. Then we will shout from the roof tops – and lift our voices in songs of glad praise. We will feast, after the fast, and share the bounty with many.

So today we hear Luke –

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory.

When the Son of Man comes the whole cosmos will be shaken.

Elsewhere in Scriptures the Son of Man is described as:

One who has eyes- like flames of fire. He wears a white robe of the High Priest/King. His feet are symbolically described as being of burnished bronze- meaning His kingdom is never ending. His voice – is like many waters drowning out the lies. And his Word is a two edged sword – bringing truth.

When the Son of Man comes the cosmos will be shaken. This is a great event in the whole earth, but also in the whole cosmos – the heavens will be shaken, the sun, moon and stars will all reflect the meaning of the day when the Son of Man comes in a cloud with power and great glory. Jesus then assures his listeners that his words will come to fulfillment – And then there are words of warning –

words about watchfulness so that day will not close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

“Pray that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” says Jesus. The day is near when we will stand before Jesus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said “God’s coming is not only a matter of glad tidings, but first of all, “frightening news for everyone who has a conscience.” The love that descended to Bethlehem, the love that will return as the Son of Man, is not the easy sympathy of a tolerant, benevolent God, but a burning fire whose light chases away every shadow, floods every corner, turns midnight into noon.

God sees our sin and does not wink at it, and does not flinch at it. Our God is not tolerant of our sin. Sin destroys us – it destroys our world, it destroys our relationships. God’s word to our sin is “not in my universe.” And with that word, God takes the most serious action imaginable – God comes to us in Christ – and takes our sin to the cross. Our sin is costly – it costs God in Christ everything.

The Son of Man that John saw coming on the clouds – he had his belt around his chest – his work completed. Jesus has completed all that needed to be done for our salvation on the cross – in his death, resurrection and glorious ascension. So what of this season of Advent... what about repentance and fasting, preparation and waiting... In the midst of all the commercial noise- and sirens calling us to spend and shop and take and do...

Jesus’ words to us are;

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be alert at all times, praying

The Message gives us the translation most fitting for this season; *But be on your guard. Don't let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise, that Day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap, for it's going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once. So, whatever you do, don't go to sleep at the switch. Pray constantly...*

Jesus' return is nearer than before... These days we prepare, we make room, we clean house, we repent, we watch, we pray... ready for that great and glorious day. Our prayer of adoration and confession probably said it best: "God remove those things that hinder love of you, that when Jesus comes, he may find us waiting in awe and wonder for him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer:

O God remind us that we do not need to be afraid, but can look to your return with longing. But Lord, may we be ready to come before you- teach us to watch and pray... Amen.