

## 12.4.2016 Second Sunday in Advent (Luke 21:25-33)

When I was growing up I spent many of my summer vacations on a horse ranch that my dad managed in central California. He not only managed this ranch that set on 60 acres near the edge of Sequoia National Park, but also worked in a nearby town as a real estate agent. When I was very young he used to take me to work with him on those days he drove into town, but as I neared my teen years I was left alone at the ranch with a list of chores to do.

To get to and from the ranch you had to drive on an old bridge that took you over the river at the edge of the property. When they built this bridge they used metal slats to cover the joints on the surface of the bridge and this method of construction resulted in a series of seven or eight very loud clapping noises every time a car drove over it. These clapping noises were a sure sign that in about a minute and a half somebody would be standing at your door.

It didn't take long for a boy who was often left alone to employ this clapping noise as an important warning sign. Every child knows that it can difficult to keep a young mind occupied through the long days of summer and many of the days I spent alone were used discovering new and more adventurous ways to entertain myself. So, for me the sound of the clapping noise emanating from the old bridge was a warning sign that time had run out. My dad was home and I had a minute and a half to clean up the mess, shut off the television, hide the candy wrappers, and of course make sure the truck was parked in the same place he left it.

You may have a similar memory. It probably wasn't the sound of a car on an old bridge, but if you were ever left at home alone as a young child it's almost certain that you have memories of a parent coming home – a car pulling into the driveway, a key being pressed into the lock of the front door, a sign that tells you time has run out.

Jesus spoke of such signs in the Gospel reading this morning when He

said, *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh”* (Luke 21:25-28).

As we consider His words we recognize two opposing reactions from those who witness these signs. On one side they sound terrifying (*“the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear... the powers of heaven shall be shaken”*), but as frightening as this sounds Jesus tells these people, the generation who would witness the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and the future generation who will recognize signs of the Last Day, *“when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”* Grown men will be scared to death, but *“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (2 Timothy 1:7). Our Savior doesn't speak of fear – He speaks of eager anticipation. He says, *“Look up! Lift up your heads! Your redemption, your Lord, the Savior of the world is drawing near.”*

When we think carefully about these opposing reactions they stir up an important question for each one of us: What can we do with the time that we have been given to ensure our reaction will not be one of terror, but of eager anticipation? I believe the answer is found in the last verse of our Gospel reading where Jesus said, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away”* (Luke 21:33). He is speaking directly to an audience filled with people who will witness the terrible destruction of the temple. He says to them this great building will soon be a pile of rubble – it will pass away, but my words which spoke of this coming destruction will remain. He says to a future generation that all of creation, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away,”* but my Word is eternal –

my words will outlive heaven and earth.

So, the real question is not what can we do with the time we have been given – the real question is what must we do with the time we have been given? We must abide in the Word (John 15:5). We have Christ's own promise that the earth, the stars, and the heavens shall pass away, but the Word of God is eternal. Therefore, if we abide in the Word, and the Word abides in us, we are eternal as well. We are secure in Christ. His "*perfect love casts out fear*" (1 John 4:18) and replaces it with eager anticipation. We who are eternally secure in Christ eagerly anticipate that great day when He will come in a cloud with power and great glory – with all the holy angels with Him, for in that day the trials and sorrows of this world will pass away leaving only His perfect love and eternal joy.

Abiding in the Word is the key to facing these signs with eager anticipation. Consider once more the young child that is left at home alone. The days that I was left at home and found myself panicking in that last minute and a half it was always due to the fact that I had let myself be distracted by things other than what my father asked me to do. I may have planned to eat one bowl of cereal and watch television for an hour, but all too often it turned into an entire box of Captain Crunch and four or five hours in front of the television. There were days that even good things like fishing, swimming, and hiking turned into distractions that prevented me from completing the important work I was supposed to be doing. Sometimes we have to lay down even what is good to take hold of what is best.

The point is this: When you leave a young child at home alone they can so easily be distracted, but if you remain with them, if you abide with them, you can help them accomplish everything you've asked them to do. The summer days that I completed every task assigned to me were those days that my father never left. With his help nothing was impossible. No longer did I have to rely on my own willpower to stay on task – I could rely on him. No longer did I have to accomplish this work using only my child-sized muscles – I could ask him to do the heavy lifting.

We who abide in Christ do not rely on the power of our own will and we

do nothing by our own strength, for our Lord assures us we are not children who have been left here alone. Jesus said, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”* (John 14:18). *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5). *“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:20). *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). God has not left us alone. He is, at this very moment, here with us, but the world, the flesh, and the devil don't want you to believe the Truth. These forces would have you think that your Father has driven across that old bridge and you should get busy living like the rest of the world.

Do not be deceived and do not be distracted from the work God our Father has called you to do. Be sober, be vigilant, for *“the one who endures to the end will be saved”* (Matthew 24:13). Our Lord tells us the Last Day is coming, *“heaven and earth shall pass away,”* but let not your heart be troubled for the Son of God has given this great promise to those who abide in Him: *“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day”* (John 6:54).