

12.4.2022 Advent 2 (Luke 21:25-33)

*“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).*

Our Gospel reading this morning is probably not quite what you would expect with just three weeks left until Christmas Day. Instead of the Angel Gabriel greeting the Blessed Virgin Mary, we read about signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars. Instead of reading about a heavenly host of angels glorifying God and singing of peace on earth and goodwill toward men, we find upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, and men’s hearts failing them for fear. Instead of the Christ child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, we meet the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Not quite what we would expect, and yet, such a powerful reminder that the season of Advent is not mainly about hanging up lights, decorating trees, or any of those things we do to prepare for the celebration of our Lord’s birth on Christmas Day, but rather, this season is primarily a time of expectant waiting and preparation for His Second Coming. This is a truth we see reflected in the Collect we pray daily throughout Advent. Our daily prayer in this season is that God would “give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through Him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.”

The text we read today is not what we’d expect to hear, this text is what we need to hear, especially now, because we live in a world of distraction, and the busyness of this particular season can be so consuming that our days are spent focused on the world, on those things Scripture describes as passing away: the finite, the natural, and the ordinary. The Gospel of our Lord challenges us, in season and out of season, to lift up our heads, to look beyond all that is temporary, and to anchor our hope in the eternal, to “*set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2).

Not on the finite, the natural, or the ordinary, but on the infinite, the supernatural, and the extraordinary. In a letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul said it this way, *“We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”* (2 Corinthians 4:18).

The world is passing away. Jesus communicated that truth in the Gospel passage, and St. Paul stated the same truth in his letter to the Corinthians. *What is seen is temporary.* The world is passing away, and while Jesus spoke in the Gospel about the end of time, a future event of which nobody knows the day or hour (Mark 13:32), His words contain a lesson that not only applies to the Last Day, but to our day as well.

Jesus spoke about *“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.”* In these verses, Jesus prophesied about the end of what is seen, the end of all things temporary, and notice what He said to His disciples after describing the world passing away. He said, *“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”*

According to Jesus, redemption draws near when the world passes away. Yes, our Lord is speaking about the Last Day, but can we not apply this Truth to our own day, and our own life? The end of all things seen and temporary may be tomorrow, or that day may be thousands of years in the future, none of us know, but we all must, by the grace of God, come to our own “last day.” The day we refuse to place our hope in anything of this passing world, and instead anchor our hope in Christ. The day we once and for all *“cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light”* (Romans 13:12). The day we boldly and definitively proclaim *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”* (Galatians 2:20).

Redemption draws near when the world passes away. Jesus told His disciples that this will be true for the people of God at the end of time, and it is true for each of us at this time. As we, by the grace of God, grow in holiness and righteousness all our days, as we strive to offer our selves, our souls and bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice, worldly desires pass away and we lift up our heads to see redemption draw near.

This is the truth the Gospel conveys to those who have eyes to see the signs, and in order to help us understand His words, Jesus told a parable. He said, *“Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near”* (Luke 21:29-31). The *things* Jesus spoke of here were signs of the Last Day, *signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars... distress of nations... the sea and the waves roaring... Men's hearts failing them for fear*. Jesus identified these things as signs of the Last Day. The things I would ask you to consider this morning are the signs of your own last day, and since our Lord told a parable about the fig tree and all the trees, perhaps we could identify the signs of our own last day based on the fruit we bear.

St. Paul defined the fruit of the Spirit as *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”* (Galatians 5:22-23). When we, by God’s grace, bear the fruit of the Spirit, when we *“see these things happening,”* we *“know that the kingdom of God is near.”* The signs of our own last day are love: love that leads to self-sacrifice, dying to self in order to live for God and neighbor. Joy: not happiness in a particular set of circumstances, but the joy of the Lord in every circumstance. Peace: the peace Christ offers, the peace of God which passes all understanding. Patience: practicing patience when we’re mistreated, being slow to anger and quick to forgive. Kindness: a gentle touch, a warm smile, or a pleasant word. Goodness: to be good to others, and to do good for others. Faithfulness: faithful to our word and promises, faithful to our friends and family, faithful to our Lord and God. Gentleness: the desire to hurt none, and to care for all. Self-control: the ability to say no to the world, the flesh, and the devil.

When you see the fruit of the Spirit being produced in your life, when you see these things happening, then look up, and lift up your heads; for redemption draws near when the world passes away. In the Gospel, Jesus spoke about signs of the Last Day, may we see the signs of our own last day, and may God bring us to it, to the end that we may rise to the life immortal, through our Savior Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Spirit, now and ever. Amen.