

12.5.2021 Advent 2 (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 three minutes 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 three minutes to clean up the mess, shut off the television, 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 these words, we recognize two very different ways that a person can react to the signs in our Gospel reading; one is fear, the other is with eager anticipation. Speaking of fear, Jesus said these signs will bring *distress of nations, with perplexity... and men's hearts failing them for fear* because of what's happening in the world, and yet, as frightening as these things sound (*the sea and the waves roaring... the powers of heaven shall be shaken*), our Lord tells the people of God to choose faith instead of fear, saying, *“When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”* Instead of fear, Jesus speaks to us 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 about these two opposing reactions, fear or eager anticipation, it may be helpful to consider once again a child whose parents have left them at home alone. The days that I found myself panicking when I heard the clapping sound emanating from that old bridge, the days when I thought my heart would fail for fear, were those days that I'd let myself become 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 the signs of my father's return made me very anxious, but there were other days when I looked forward with eager anticipation to those same signs. There were days when I could hardly wait for my dad to come home because I wanted to show him everything that had been accomplished while he was away.

One of the great themes of Advent is the importance of using this time we've

been given to prepare for our Lord's return. We use this season, we use this Christian life to prepare so that we can look forward to that Day with eager anticipation. Jesus spoke of the necessity of always being ready when He told His disciples, *"Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"* (Mark 13:33-37).

We are servants who have been given authority in the kingdom of God, who have been given work to do in our Lord's vineyard, who have been told to *watch* for the return of our Master and only Savior, and the *"good and faithful"* (Matthew 25:23) servants who are diligent in their work, *watch* with eager anticipation. We strive to be like obedient children whose hearts are filled with joy when we hear a clapping sound emanating from that bridge or a key being pressed into the lock on the front door. As children of God we don't fear, we look up, we lift up our heads and eagerly anticipate the Day when our Lord will come with power and great glory, for we know in that day the trials and sorrows of this difficult, fallen world will, as Jesus said, *pass away* leaving only His Word, His perfect love and eternal joy.

If your childhood was anything like mine, there were times when you were left at home alone, days when it was easy to become distracted and fail to complete the work you were called to do. If your Christian life has been anything like mine, you may still struggle with distractions that keep you from completing all that God has called you to do, and perhaps this tendency we have to let the world divert our attention is one reason that God has not driven across that old bridge and left us 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). Our Lord is, and will always be Emmanuel, *"God with us"* (Matthew 1:23). God is with us, to help us watch and pray and

prepare. By His grace and through the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit may we use the time He has given us wisely, so that we may look forward with eager anticipation to the day we will hear our Lord say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord”* (Matthew 25:23).