

## **Luke 21:25-36**

**<sup>25</sup> “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. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

**<sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**

**<sup>34</sup> “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

## **December 2, 2018**

At times, it may seem ridiculous to state the obvious, but more often than not, it is helpful. That can be due to the fact that we have gotten distracted and our focus is not on what is right in front of us. Or, because we are so familiar with something that we no longer are really paying close attention, we simply take it for granted. This is true in all areas of our life; our jobs, our families, our relationships.

So, I am going to start off by stating the obvious. First, being a Christian, that is someone who is a follower of Christ, well, it puts you out of step with the rest of the world.

For example, the season of Advent makes this clear. For us, Advent marks the beginning of a new year. While the rest of the world is getting ready to finish a year, we are already starting a new one.

Another obvious point to state, that makes this clear, is last Sunday, even though we were not able to gather due to the bad weather – but last Sunday, at the end of our Christian year, it was Christ the King Sunday. And much like the world in Jesus’ day, the world today still has an idea of what being a king means, what it looks like to be someone with power and authority – and still today, following Jesus, being a humble servant especially to those who are on the margins, well, that puts us out of step with this world.

And here is another obvious point to be mentioned – for many Christians, but I do have to say, not all – to that point, for many of our sisters and brothers in Christ, when the conversation comes up about the season of Advent, let alone mid-week worship services during Advent, they will say, “Oh yeah, Advent”, almost like it is an afterthought. So, don’t let Advent be an afterthought. But here is the obvious point – Advent is a time of waiting and preparation. And here is what we are waiting and preparing for; the coming of Christ.

Now this point may not be quite as obvious as we would hope, because in this season of Advent, while it may be familiar to us, still it is good to be reminded that we are focused on Jesus coming once, into history, as experienced as a baby in a manger. Jesus coming now, in mystery as experienced through proclaimed word, through bread and wine, through community. And Jesus coming again, in the future, in majesty.

Each week when we gather here in worship, Christ is present in this assembly. He makes himself present with his body and blood in the bread and wine we share at the table. He reveals himself through this faith community we share here at Good Shepherd. So that we can live daily in the reality that Jesus comes to us here, now, in mystery.

But for most people, it is most obvious which part we are focused on as we start a new year as Christians, is the part about Jesus coming once, into history. In 22 days from now, we will be celebrating Jesus coming as a baby in a manger. And nothing seems to say or speak to a new year, a new start, a new life, like a new baby. And so, it would seem most obvious that at the beginning of a new year, we would start at the beginning, with a baby in a manger.

But this brings us to some of the not so obvious points. Instead, we start this new year off this morning, focused not on the first coming of Jesus into history, but focused on Jesus coming again – his second coming where he will come, in the future, in majesty.

So, on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of this Advent season, we find ourselves, not at the beginning of Luke’s Gospel story, hearing about Mary and Joseph waiting and preparing, but instead, we find ourselves toward the end of Luke’s Gospel, shortly before Jesus will be arrested and killed. And we get these words here this morning from Jesus.

And still in the midst of this, I do sincerely hope it is obvious for each of us, that Advent offers us the expectation and hope for something new – in our lives and in our hearts.

But here is something else that may not be quite so obvious – Jesus’ words here are Good News. They are words of encouragement and hope. Now, I have to admit, it may not seem this way at first. Jesus is talking here about distress among nations, and the fact that people will be fainting from fear and foreboding about what is coming upon the world. He continues to say that the powers of the heavens will be shaken. In short, it will seem like the world is coming apart at the seams and that will be, because it is.

Now none of this may seem at all encouraging or hopeful to us, but most likely it does seem real. Can you relate? When you look around at our world today, if you pay attention to nothing but the headlines, or the talking heads, or the non-stop twitter wars, does it feel like the world is coming apart at the seams?

I know there are some people that would say things are as bad as they have ever been. But perhaps if some of the people from our past, those who have gone before us, if they could come back and join us in conversations, from the different places in history that they had lived, they might just argue that indeed we have seen worse as a people – whether it was during various wars, during slavery, during the Civil Rights era, or so many other times in our history.

That is not to say that everything is great, that there are no injustices, that there is nothing that we should strive to improve in our day, we know better than that, but some perspective is helpful.

Those from our past might point out that while we may feel like we are walking up hill both ways. You know, those older relatives that always talked about walking up hill both ways going to and from school, well they might say that perhaps the hills we face are not as big as some that have been in the past.

Or maybe they are. Perhaps you are struggling with situations in your life that at times seem insurmountable, like there are big hills both ways. And when you are facing those hills, those challenges, those battles in life, it really doesn't matter if someone else's hills or mountains have been or are bigger or smaller than yours. You still have to face what is in front of you.

Jesus was clear about this. When he spoke these words, he knew that a short time later he would be crucified. And to many, it would seem like the world was coming apart at the seams. Then, when Luke wrote these words in his Gospel, some 50 years later, and the readers and hearers of Jesus' words at that time, they were undergoing persecution at the hands of the Romans. Their survival seemed uncertain. The temple was in ruins. And they too much have thought that the world was coming apart at the seams.

So, what are we to do with this? It doesn't seem all that obvious that this has anything to do with Good News, and expectation, and hope. When faced with the world coming apart at the seams, what are we to do?

We could try the Lucy approach – you know of Lucy and Charlie Brown fame. Charlie Brown asked Lucy, “Lucy, do you think the world will come to an end in our time? Lucy said, “I try not to think about such things.” “Well”, says Charlie Brown, “Now that I've brought it to your attention, what do you think?” Lucy then says, “When things that I try not to think about are brought to my attention, I try not to think about them.”

That is certainly one approach. And it very well may be the approach we try all too often to use. But it is not the approach that Jesus wants us to take. Not now, and not here at the beginning of a new year, a fresh start, new life.

As we wait and prepare this Advent season, we receive this message of assurance. We are not to let the worries of this life weigh us down and be so distracted that we miss Jesus' coming. The signs in the sun, the moon, the stars, represent the cosmic powers and Jesus is pointing out that all the familiar powers of this world are losing their influence, that all the things of this world that we put our security in, they will fall apart. This is the time, this Advent is the time, for us to prepare, to put our security, our hope, our faith, in the one who will not pass away, the one who is the very word of God.

It may not seem all that obvious to us, and it sure isn't obvious to this world, but when these things take place, as we wait for Jesus' return, we are not to run and hide. We are to raise our heads. Jesus wants us to live with a confidence and faith that is in him. That is why he tells us to be alert at all times and to pray. So that we will not be distracted or focused on the wrong things. We are to know, regardless of any delay we might assume, or any confusion that we may have, that as followers of Jesus, we can trust that things will come to pass just as he has described, according to his word.

As we start a new year as followers of Christ, I trust it is obvious why we are out of step with this world. It is because of Jesus. Because of Jesus and his coming – his coming before, his coming now, and his coming in the future, we live a life of expectation rather than preoccupation. We live with hope rather than dread. Because of Jesus and his coming, we can live with confidence, we can hear these words this morning and they are soothing rather than shocking, reassuring rather than frightening, we can lift our heads in faith rather than fear.

Here at the beginning of Advent, at the beginning of a new year, what we are to do really consists of just two things. Think of it this way; pay and pray. That is, pay attention and pray without ceasing. That is good advice not just in Advent, but all the time.

Another way to say this is to keep your head up and your knees down. Keep your knees down in prayer and keep your head up and stay alert, because your redemption is drawing near.

We begin this new year in confidence, in the hope and the promise that God is not just the God of our past, but also the God of our present and our future. Our present, our future, is all in God's hands.

And as we wait and prepare for Christ to come again, we will indeed make it to Christmas Eve where then too we will be out of step with this world, as we will keep our heads up and our knees down around a manger – where God once again will invade the normal with the extraordinary, and it will be too obvious for us to miss or ignore.

Amen.