

Sermon Advent 2 2021

December 5, 2021

Luke 21:25-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

It's often the case that as the pastor of a church, I get a fair amount of mail regarding various opportunities to give to charitable causes. This week I got a piece that really struck my eye. It was from a pastor I've met by the name of Leif Camp. Pr. Camp serves as a missionary in the former Soviet Union, and that's something I've always respected about him. Imagine being able to bring the Gospel of our Lord to this land that actually had a very relatively strong foundation in the Lord until the faith was nearly eradicated by the officials of the Soviet Union. Actually, that was exactly what Pr. Camp's correspondence communicated. He discussed how they were trying to rebuild that which had been decimated. And as he did so, he related some of the history of how this happened. Apparently immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, being a Christian had become significantly more difficult, but not impossible. However, as the regime dug in further and further in its tyranny Christianity actually became outlawed and Christians were persecuted and even killed. What Pr. Camp described with this connected to celebrating Christmas. He said that Christians there now often celebrate Christmas in a fashion almost more akin to a birthday party at a home—if they celebrate it at all. We very rightly gather together in some of the most well-attended services of the year to hail the birth of our Savior, but there for so many it's lauded quietly, again if at all. This is such a challenge for Pr. Camp. Perhaps not Christmas itself, but what that reflects. It's such a challenge to rebuild this faith that, like I said, has been laid waste in the midst of the atheistic environment there.

As I say all of this, I think there's concern because of how many people in our own country seem to be increasingly intrigued if not enamored with ideas comparable to this. Now, from what I understand those who advocate for us to move in such directions argue that those who have done this before didn't do it right. However, we see that as this is grounded in views of the world that deny the existence of God, if the country would move in this direction, it would not mean good things ultimately for the Church.

And as I say that, that's part of the point in me bringing all of this up. As we see the country and culture in so many ways moving toward things that are not good for the Church, as we see countries around the world which have been grounded in the faith historically doing things that are not helpful for the Church, for example Bishop

Pohjola in Finland being prosecuted with hate speech for a pamphlet he wrote about homosexuality, this makes us worry. There's worry, what destruction will this bring to the world if brought to fruition?

And that's just the cultural things where we can see the possibility of harm to the Church. Our Lord talks about persecution in the Gospels, but in today's lesson, He also talks about something else. He talks about ways that we will see things in creation. **"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken."** We hear about that, and if you're like me, that can make you worry too. Can't it? We see how destructive tornados, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, and the like can all be. What's the appropriate reaction? We can appreciate why people would be **"fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world."** In fact, we see how many of us have wrestled with that worry and "fainting with fear" with the pandemic around us. This is what we do in uncertainty. And in so many ways, it's understandable, isn't it? When our security seems insecure.

But what does Jesus say? **Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.** I love the way He says it there. "Straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Not "because the end is near," although that's accurate enough. Not "because I am coming," also good as we understand it properly. But "because your redemption is drawing near." I read something this week that made the point that this redemption is the wholeness of our hope. It said that this is hoped for with "unparalleled desire"—that those who hope for it hope for nothing greater. And it said that this isn't just the liberation from sin—although that's important because it is that liberation that creates the fullness of what this is. It says that this is the whole hope of the kingdom of heaven. When you see all these things happening, you have that hope that heaven is coming: the freedom from sin, and with it all pain, sorrow, and suffering.

I've mentioned this before, but I remember when 9/11 happened, I saw it like this a bit. To be sure, I was perhaps naïve in many ways, and I wasn't considerate of how awful the suffering of those who grieved in the midst of it was, but I remember anticipation. I remember thinking with anticipation that these were signs that the Lord was coming, that redemption was drawing near. While we don't want to minimize that suffering, and the need to care for those who experience it, it's good to consider what all of this does point to: our redemption is drawing near!

You see, when we see the troubles in the world, when we see the signs in nature—and we could maybe even be seeing some of this in the issues surrounding climate change, as controversial of a topic as that might be. That may well be the earth groaning in the pangs of the birth of the new creation.

You see that's a point that Jesus makes here too: **Heaven and earth will pass away.** This creation will fall away. It's broken by sin, it's not going to last forever. But there will be a new creation. Jesus will bring this redemption and He will bring a New Heavens and a New Earth. That's where even our bodies will be raised, and we'll live before our Lord eternally.

Those of you who are in our Bible Class on Wednesdays heard about this this week as we read from Revelation 7, that passage from Revelation that we have every All Saints' Day; that passage that describes how the Church Triumphant, the Church that has been raised to live with the Lord forever will be there in His presence. And it tells about how we will be with Him—and that of course is the most important piece of all this—we will be with Him, and He will shelter us with His presence. It tells of how we the sun will not strike us nor any scorching heat. It tells of how the Lamb on His throne, Jesus Himself, will be our Shepherd and lead us to springs of living water. And He will wipe away our every tear. Christians, is there any thought more worthy of hope and consideration?! The God who created the universe knows you, and will bring you to His Kingdom, and He will personally care for you, comforting you from every sorrow!

You can see why Jesus says to straighten up and raise our heads. You can see why He uses this imagery telling us to be ready with anticipation.

But what does that look like? Well, I touched on this last week too, but to put it in the context of the readings for today, look at the lesson here. Jesus says, **“watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.”** There's a call that we live lives that are sober and prepared for the eternal things, not lives bogged down for the cares of this world. And as I say that, I have to admit I always read that in light of a hedonistic drunkenness. I thought of this just as a warning to not pursue the pleasures of this world over and against the kingdom of God. But look at the response of people in the midst of the quarantine for COVID. I read a statistic that said alcohol sales increased 54% in the year after the virus came. That means that people on average drank half again as much alcohol as the year before. And why? Because of stress, right? Because of the way that alcohol softens the blows of the cares of this world. “I don't know what this virus is and how to deal with and what it will mean for

my life—that terrifies me, so I’ll drink to allay the worry.” But will that ultimately solve it? No. So Jesus tells us to not be weighed down with the cares of this life.

Do not be weighed down because, yes this world will pass, heaven and earth will pass away. But what won’t? His Word—**“but my words will not pass away.”** The thing that will remain forever is Jesus’ Word. So, build your lives on that word. Rest on that Word. Rest on the promises it speaks into your existence. Rest on the assurance it gives that your sin is forgiven and in view of that, Jesus’ return is redemption for you into His kingdom. And in light of that faith, what does the word also tell you to do?

“Stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Now, I’m sure this goes without saying, but Jesus isn’t telling you to never sleep. We all know that’s impossible for us to do, instead He’s just encouraging to you to be diligent in your watch for Him. And what else does He say to do? He says to pray. Pray “that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Pray that He will keep you and sustain you. That’s what faith does. Faith—like in Peter’s story where he walked on water—it looks at Jesus. It doesn’t look away because in looking away it sinks. No, it looks at Jesus and He keeps it sustained. It doesn’t look at the world and the terrors of nature, at the viruses that could kill us. No, it looks to the One bringing redemption, it looks to that Word of the Good Shepherd who does not lie, and whose Word will never pass away. And it prays to Him. It doesn’t turn inward on itself, but glorifying and petitioning that One who deserves all glory and who promises to hear us. That’s our hope. He does hear us.

So, as you look around at those goings on in the world that worry you, Christian, there you have your encouragement. Like Paul says in His letter to the Romans for today, **“whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”** That Word spoken from Jesus is your hope. And it promises of that great day of Redemption, your Redemption. Rest then in the knowledge of that peace as we celebrate the initiation of that redemption at Jesus’ birth in this coming season. Amen.