

Pastor T.C. Arnold
2nd Sunday in Advent
Luke 21:25-36
December 7th, 2014

We dislike doing it. Even more, we hate it when it's done to us. Sometimes we need to do it. Sometimes we need it done to us. What I'm talking about is admonishment.

Now before we go any further I think it's important to understand what "admonishment" really means. Sometimes we get such a sour taste in our mouth over such a word that we forget being admonished really is for our own good – and for our personal growth. You see, the word "admonish" can mean three different things. First, it can mean to reprove gently but earnestly. Sometimes we forget about the gently and earnestly part. Secondly, it means to counsel another against something to be avoided. This definition is for the benefit of those being admonished so they don't get hurt or tread down a path to destruction. Thirdly, admonish means to remind of something forgotten or disregarded, as an obligation or responsibility. This is important because we sometimes do forget those things that are the most important to us and for us.

Last Sunday we talked about how we are to prepare for the Lord's coming. In our Gospel text Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the people were singing, "*Hosanna – blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.*" They were making preparations for the Lord to carry out His good work of dying on the cross. In Advent – we prepare for our Lord to come – not just as a baby in Bethlehem but preparing for His coming again on the last day.

This Sunday we take it all one step further. We talk more directly about that "coming again" of our Lord on the last day. He calls us to be prepared for our Lord to come back. In the Gospel text Jesus "admonishes" us to see His coming again as the key component in our lives. He admonishes to see that our celebration of Advent and Christmas will ultimately see its conclusion, not at the manger (that's the beginning) but on the last day. You see, this admonishment is for us and for our own good.

In the Gospel text for today we are admonished by Jesus four different times. Remember, Jesus admonishes those He loves. Out of the three definitions of admonishment, it's that third one Jesus uses here in the text – to remind of something forgotten or disregarded. However, I think it's this third one we want to keep in mind when Jesus speaks to us today – to remind us of something we tend to forget or disregard.

(Look at your bulletin insert) First of all Jesus admonishes us in love when He says in the text (and we say together), "*straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.*" The Lord is making sure we don't forget to have our heads lifted high, that is, prepared for our Lord's coming again. He makes sure to tell us not to be bent over in fear or fainting. Often times we do this – because we fear to make eye contact with our Lord. We fear our sins will be exposed or that when we talk to God, He's only going to see our bad and look the other way. Sometimes we forget to look up because there are too many great things to look at right before our eyes and they are so much more pleasing and we allow those things to dominate all our time and thoughts.

But we are admonished in this situation because the Lord would want us to look up – get our heads out of those things that cloud our sight of Jesus, and focus on the comforting nearness of the Christian's redemption. That's the key – the comforting nearness. The day is drawing near. The Lord admonishes us to see what we have in Christ's marvelous work for us on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Look at that and not anything else.

Secondly Jesus admonishes us to focus on the nearness of the kingdom. We say together, "*When you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.*" Our problem is – we don't see these things taking place – or – don't care to acknowledge them. Sure the signs of the end times are among us. When will the Lord come? We don't know the day or the hour when He will come. But every day we are to be ready – just as the fig tree will come out in leaf in the spring -- so too will Jesus come.

We can be just as sure. To doubt this coming, or to ignore it all together, is dangerous. The kingdom is near.

See – is the word our Lord would like for us to focus on in the parable. See – the Lord. Whether we are talking about Jesus in the manger at Christmas or Jesus on the cross on Good Friday – see the Lord. See Him and know that He is near and that nearness is comforting – not scary. When life deals us a bad hand, see the nearness of the Lord – that’s not scary that’s comforting. When courage is needed to confront whatever makes us tremble, see the nearness of the Lord – that’s nothing to fear, that’s strengthening. His blood gives us that strength and our strength to move forward knowing we are not alone.

Thirdly the Lord Jesus admonishes us to “beware” – or as the text says, “*watch yourselves.*” We say together, “*But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life...*” The day will come suddenly. Again, we heed the warning. My dad worked for the Telephone Company for years. He told me he would never venture into the back yard of someone who had a “Beware of Dog” sign. He would go to the front door first and ask them if they would put the dog inside for a little while. We heed, or should heed warnings on the labels of our prescription drugs. If not, we might put our health – even our lives – at risk (and I have seen this happen). If we are good about these “Beware” signs for our physical health, then why not be good about these words of Jesus for our spiritual well-being?

This is why we have Advent – to draw us back to focus our eyes right there on the manger and for us realize that in that tiny little baby is born the King of all Kings. Our awareness rests in that small child and nowhere else. Our Lord’s admonishment leads us to what we can see and what is more important. It leads us to know – we dare not take risks but rather put our trust in what we know is going to be favorable outcome for you and me. That outcome is the precious life won for us by a King who would come to be like us. Beloved in the Lord, beware – and be AWARE – for the King comes to you. There is no reason to look anywhere else.

There is one more admonishment that comes from our Lord Jesus. He simply says in verse 36 – “stay awake.” We say together, “*But 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.*” Often we don’t watch. We run into things when we aren’t watching where we are going. The Lord would caution us to make sure that we “watch out” for anything that might get in our way of our faith and those good things in life that He would like for us to enjoy, preserve and protect. If we are not keeping watch, we not only will miss all that good – we may run into that bad.

Then, how do we keep watch? Our Lord shows us how in the Scriptures. One aspect of remaining watchful is prayer. When we pray we sometimes pray with words that pour forth out of times of distress as we plea to God for help. Jesus himself will provide a dramatic example of prayer in distress that show how His eyes were “keeping watch” when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before His crucifixion. The faithful pray for strength to flee – that is, endure, persevere in faith through “all these things that are about to happen.” He gives us the strength to shun these distractions and to “stay awake and keep watch.” Strength comes from the words of our Lord, which do not pass away, for the Christian who hears with a heart that is prepared by our Lord.

With these admonitions our Lord reminds us of something important – lest it be forgotten. He reminds us to straighten up and raise our heads. He reminds us to see what the fig tree will do – knowing that summer is near by the budding of the tree. He reminds us to “beware” for that day will come suddenly. He reminds us to “stay awake and be watchful” at all times praying for strength to flee. All these things are given by our God first – so that we can then be ready to hear the beautiful message of the Gospel. Jesus has stood in our place when we have fallen. Jesus is the one who will come again. He makes us ready people by His grace through our faith in Him for the precious Kingdom to come. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen