

Sermon for Advent II – Luke 21:25-36

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

It seems a little out of place for us that our Gospel reading for today is about a blossoming fig tree. If our trees have any leaves on them at all, they are all dried up and brown. Sure, we can remember spring with fresh green leaves and blossoming flowers. We can recall warm summer days. But right now bitter winter is coming. More snow, temperatures below freezing – that's what's on our horizon. But a blooming fig tree? That seems like a cruel joke this time of year!

Yet as out of place as it seems, the fig tree sprouting leaves is a precious symbol of joy. Christ's Second Coming is going to be accompanied with many catastrophic signs. The sun and moon will be darkened. Stars will fall from the sky. There will be winds and waves like never before on the oceans. The very foundations of creation will shake. And when we see these disasters, Christ tells us to think of a serene and peaceful fig tree in the spring.

But how is such destruction and devastation like a blossoming fig tree? Isn't it more like our Lord cursing the fig tree? Why does Christ tell us to look at the world laid waste in a positive light?

This is what our evil world wonders. When the world sees these disastrous things happening, they will be devastated. Christ is describing the end of the world. This world. This world full of material things and organizations and hobbies and activities that people love. He is describing the end of all possessions: houses and gadgets, cities and nations, bank accounts and investments, everything in the world. Those who do not believe in Christ, who seek entertainment and happiness and stress-free lives rather than Jesus and His cross, will be devastated when Jesus comes to remove the cross from His Church and destroy everything in this world. They will be devastated because they love the creation and not the Creator. They will be devastated because everything they lived and worked for is up in smoke, and One whom they despised and ignored is coming on the clouds of heaven to judge them.

But we who trust in Christ have a different perspective on Judgement Day. It will be, as Christ says, like the fig tree. The fig tree in bloom means the summer is near. The fig tree in bloom means the sun is going to shine. The fig tree in bloom means life will be green and beautiful once again. The blossoming fig tree is the symbol of our joy, the blossoming fig tree is the symbol of our redemption, the blossoming fig tree is the symbol of the Second Coming of our Jesus who will finally welcome us into the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

For those who trust in Christ, the destruction of this world will be a sign of the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth. It will not devastate those who trust in Christ because, while they use and even enjoy many things in this world, they do not worship them. The fact that they will not have their favorite football team anymore, will not bother them. Why? They will have Jesus. The fact that our great country, the USA and all its institutions and government, and organizations will end does not alarm them. Why? They will have Jesus. The fact that their video games and clothes and houses and vacations and cars and every other possession in this world will be burned up will not bring their life to ruin. Why? They will have Jesus. And because they have Jesus they will raise their heads because their Redeemer is drawing near; Jesus is drawing near with the

blessings that He brings. As the blooming fig tree promises summer, so the destruction of this present world means the eternal summer is finally coming for all the saints.

The future judgement forces us to wrestle with finality. We have to stop and think. Ask yourself: would I rather have Jesus than my sports and hobbies? Would I rather have Jesus than the institutions and organizations that I and my family hold dear? Would I rather have Jesus than the possessions I have accumulated in this world? Does the destruction of these things sound like a nightmare, or does it point me to eternal joy in my Lord Jesus? If I had to choose, what do I find most important?

We have chosen the things of this world over Jesus. The cares of this life weigh us down. How can we stand on the Day of Judgement? How can we face God on the Last Great Day? If we have loved this creation more than our Creator, how can the budding fig tree be a comforting reminder of our Lord's return?

Only because there is another tree besides the fig tree. A tree that is more than just a happy reminder of Judgement Day. A tree that stands forever as evidence that you are redeemed and saved. It is the tree of Good Friday. It is the cross of Christ. On that tree Christ was hanged and judged as the sinner in your stead. He was wholly devoted to His Father's will. He faced your punishment. He died on the tree so that you might live forever. He saved you. The tree of Good Friday is the Tree of Life. On it, Christ was judged for you, so that you are now judged through what He has done for you.

This is what the church is all about. Even though you are guilty, you hear the blessed promise that springs from the Tree of Life, the promise that comes from the Cross of Christ: "I forgive you all your sins." Because Christ died for you, you are judged forgiven. Because He rose, you are declared not guilty in God's sight.

So if you are declared forgiven and not guilty *now* through Christ's Word, how do you think you will stand before the Son of Man on Judgement Day? You are judged not guilty now before the Son of Man as you kneel before this altar and receive in your mouth Christ in His Body and Blood for your forgiveness and salvation. You are judged not guilty now before the Son of Man as you kneel and receive His absolution proclaimed for your salvation. So take comfort in His Word and Sacraments. They are His pardoning declaration for you right now so that you will stand before the Son of Man on Judgement Day forgiven, ready to inherit the kingdom prepared for you from eternity.

It seems out of place to be talking about blooming fig trees in the midst of what looks to be one of Kansas City's coldest winters. Yet for us Lutherans, we embrace the discrepancy. In the midst of sin, sickness, suffering, and death we talk about life – the Tree of Life, the Cross, where the Son of Man died for you to cancel your sin and rose for you to destroy death and give you eternal life. To Christ be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠