

Sermon for Advent II – Luke 21:25-36

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

“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 waves ... the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” The coming of God’s kingdom effects the whole universe! In no unclear terms, Jesus told this fact to His disciples. The twelve were gathered around their Lord when He made these predictions. At the time they were outside. Before Jesus’ words, they were admiring the impressive appearance of the temple. It was King Herod’s temple, at least built under his reign in Judea. The temple was opulently decorated; what’s more, it was also the largest religious structure in the world at the time. This was the pinnacle of God’s habitation in the world, literally heaven on earth to anyone who would see it.

But Jesus tells His disciples that this magnificent place would be destroyed. So they ask the obvious questions: When will this happen? How?

Our Lord answers the question of course, but His response goes well beyond the scope of the question asked. Not only will the temple be destroyed – an event that takes place in 70 A.D., but signs in sun, moon, and stars will happen. Distress will take place in all nations, not just Israel. What’s more, Christ Himself will return in great glory.

Jesus’ message to His disciples past and present is clear: Be prepared to face what is to come. There is no sugar coating here. The world that hated Jesus will hate His disciples. That means us. The whole history and future of the church is tribulation to Christians. The whole history and future of the church is suffering to Christians. In order to stand firm in the day of trial we need to be prepared. But how do we do that?

First, we know the signs that will be coming: signs in the sun, moon, and stars; perplexity in the nations, roaring in the sea, people fainting, the heavens shaken, and eventually the heavens and earth passing away. We’ve been told – we shouldn’t be surprised as this is happening.

Second, watch yourselves. Don’t let your heart be weighed down with overindulgence and the cares of this life. But it’s hard not to this time of year, right? When the rest of the world has already been celebrating Christmas, or at least the spectacular façade they call Christmas, the pressure is on to make “the holidays” an unforgettable and remarkable event, and it’s hard not to get caught up in the hoopla. But we know the truth – the most remarkable and spectacular event took place 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, when God took on human flesh. And at the time appointed, He was nailed to a cross and died. That afternoon the sun shone black and the earth was shaken. But three days later the Son of Man was resurrected in great power and glory while Roman soldiers guarding the tomb fainted with fear and foreboding of what was coming on the world. The central meaning of Christmas, then, is just that – Christ-Mass, our

crucified and risen Savior dwelling with us in His Body and Blood. The work is done, everything else is minor details at best.

Third, trust. "Your redemption is drawing near." That's a promise. That's the joy we have when the rest of the world is crumbling and in chaos. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." As we are joined to God's Word in Baptism, we are His, and we too will live eternally. Trust.

The hardships that you and I face should not drive us to despair. "Your redemption is drawing near." Christ will not abandon us. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." He will preserve us in the midst of suffering. The certainty of our redemption in the Son of Man who comes in glory is our source of strength and comfort as we face the hardships to come. And not just the catastrophic events (though we find comfort in Christ for those too), but the everyday hardships we face: broken relationships, the guilt of sins past, and doubting God's provision. Our faith in Christ and the certain hope of our redemption enables us to be prepared to face the suffering to come without giving way to fear and despair. "Your redemption is drawing near."

"And [Jesus] told them a parable: 'Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.'" Though it doesn't look like it, the fig tree is in bloom. Summer is near. The smell of blossoms fills the air. Fruit to eat and wine to drink will soon be here as well. You know what the fig bud means. It means summer is coming. So look here and see the fig buds of Jesus' body and blood, His inspired Word, His Absolution, His Holy Baptism. He visits us now. He comes to us in the hour of need, now, in grace and mercy. He is the crucified and risen Lord, for our sake and for our good.

This world is evil. We are surrounded by danger, temptation, constant injustice, but Jesus is faithful. He has ascended, but He has not abandoned us. He comes to visit us now with mercy in His wings. He comes with hope and comfort and a promise: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." "Your redemption is drawing near."

Christ's coming in Word and Sacrament shows us that the Day which has no end is dawning, summer is coming, that winter will end, and that He has not forgotten us. He is the fig leaf that foreshows the end. He covers our nakedness and shame in a way that the hastily stitched-together fig leaves of our primal parents could not. By grace, His Baptism covers all of our disgrace. We are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. We are redeemed. We are ready for the end. Straighten up. Lift up your head. Rejoice. Our Lord comes in grace and mercy. Amen.

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