

First Sunday in Advent – December 2, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 21:25-36 (NIV)

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. (26) People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. (27) At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (28) When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (29) He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. (30) When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. (31) Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. (32) "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (33) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (34) "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. (35) For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. (36) Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Dear friends in Christ:

Another church year has come to a close and we are once again by God's grace set to enter into another year of grace. As believers in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are able to face each day with joy in our hearts and with watchfulness and prayer because we know that our Lord has promised to be with us until he comes again in glory so...

Theme: Let Us Enter Another Year of Grace

1. With joy in our hearts
2. With watchfulness and prayer

Jesus spoke the words of our sermon text on the Tuesday of Holy Week, the Jewish Passover celebration. He and his disciples were worshipping in the temple when some of them were commenting on the great beauty of the temple. Christ, however, warned his disciples not to get mesmerized by its greatness. "It would be destroyed," he told them. He told them that the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem was also a picture of the greater destruction of the whole world on Judgment Day. Jesus' disciples naturally wondered, "When? How?"

Jesus, first of all, provided them with some general signs which would foreshadow his second coming. (Luke 21:11 NIV) **There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places ...** These signs which seem so much a part of everyday life in the world are continually reminders that this world will one day come to an end. In our text Jesus seems to be getting a bit more specific about signs that will announce his return at the end of the world. **"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. (26) People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.**

Immediately before the Lord's return, it will seem as if the laws of nature will no longer be in force. Sun, moon and stars will no longer appear to be following their normal courses. Unbelievers will be in anguish and perplexity. They will cry out in great fear and despair. In their confusion, they will not know where to turn. Could this be the year in which our Lord returns? We don't know but even if it is we can still look ahead with joy in hearts rather than with fear and anguish because the end of the world will mean the beginning

of eternal life with our Lord. Jesus assures us: **At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (28) When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."**

Given everything Jesus has said will take place prior to his return it would be natural to bury one's head in fear – to be afraid to look up and see what is coming next. But Jesus directs his disciples to remain joyful. He instructs them to react in the exact opposite manner than they would naturally. He said, *"Lift up your heads..."* Why does Christ instruct his disciples to do this? *"Because your redemption is drawing near."* Jesus' second coming will bring his disciples' final deliverance. As a believer in Christ, you do not need to fear the signs of the last day, but rather you can rejoice over them. Believers can rejoice because Jesus' second coming is an event of power and glory (cf. v. 27). Christ will show his power over sin and this sinful world. See, all the suffering, pain, and hardship of this world will disappear at Jesus' second coming. So what will remain? Christ's words, his message of salvation through him alone will remain. That is something for his disciples to remain joyful about!

How do you react when you lose in competition? I know what I do. I put my head down because I lost or failed. Why does Jesus tell us to lift up our heads at his second coming? We lift up our heads because the victory is ours. Jesus has provided that victory for us. His death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins and his resurrection from the grave give him every right to come on the last day in power and glory. We remain joyful because his Word has taken root in our hearts. We remain joyful because his Word endures in his holy Supper, and gives us the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. We will remain joyful on that great day because of his great power over sin and death.

In this new year of grace, our Lord's promises will sustain us and fill our hearts with joy as we await his glorious and powerful return. Jesus assures us in our text: **Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.** Jesus will return just as he promised so may we enter this new year of grace with watchfulness and prayer. **Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."**

Christ instructed his disciples how they should remain watchful for the last day. He said, **"When these things begin to take place, stand up...Be always on the watch"** (vv 28, 36). Jesus isn't just we should get out of our chairs and stare at the heavens as we see signs of his return in the world around us. It is much more than that. He literally said, "stand up straight." Christ calls on us to stand up "at attention." Like a soldier stands "at attention," listening and looking for his commanding officer's signal, so those who are waiting for Jesus to return to rescue them are to stand up and pay close attention to the signals God gives on Judgment Day.

He instructs, "Remain watchful" for my second coming. And this isn't just a part-time job, either! Christ says, **"Be always on the watch."** Jesus goes even one step further in the original language, he says, "Stay awake at all times."

Why was Jesus so intense about his disciples remaining vigilant in their watchfulness? Well, he knew of the dangers that would come along with the last day. He explains, **"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.** Constant watchfulness can be rather tiring and fatiguing. All too often, we are not remaining watchful. The desires of our sinful flesh "weigh us down." We may follow the ways of unbelievers in this sinful world and hope to find relief from our troubles in drunkenness as Jesus warns about. We may worry too much about the things (stress?) of life rather than set our hope on the life that is coming on the last day. So, Jesus directs you to remain watchful! He tells us to stand straight up and continually pay close

attention for the signs of his second coming because he will come unexpectedly. Judgment Day will come like a thief in the night” (cf. 2 Thess. 5:3).

We all know what date on the calendar we celebrate Jesus’ birth, his first coming. It is December 25th year in and year out. Granted, we don’t actually know if December 25th is the actual date or not. However, it is predictable and expected by everyone. On the other hand, Jesus here tells his disciples that his second coming is not that predictable and expected. In fact, he says it is totally unpredictable! Judgment Day’s unexpectedness was so important for Jesus to explain that he instructed his disciples over and over again about it. He warned them earlier in his ministry, **“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him”** (Lk 12:40 NIV). Judgment Day could end up snapping shut in an instant, like an animal trap, on those people who do not remain watchful for it.

If we do not remain watchful, we will be caught in a trap on Judgment Day. It’s easy to become distracted that’s why Jesus urges us to couple our watchfulness with prayer.

Jesus directs his disciples to remain prayerful. Christ said, **“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”** “Pray” here is a present tense verb. So, just as Jesus instructs his disciples to continually remain watchful for his second coming, he instructs them to continually pray to the Lord. Why? So his disciples will be able to stand up before the Lord as blameless and holy (1 Thess. 3:13).

Hezekiah, the Old Testament king of Judah, is called, “Man of Prayer.” He remained prayerful to the Lord, even under the harshest circumstances. The destruction of Jerusalem was a foregone conclusion. Their enemies, the Assyrians, had besieged the city, and it was only a matter of time before they took over. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord and entirely relied on him for deliverance. The Lord heard his prayer and delivered his people. “That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp” (cf. 2 Kgs 19:35).

Jesus directs us to remain prayerful. He hears our prayers for final deliverance. We trust in his power to save us from the grips of Satan and hell. He will come with his angels (cf. Mt. 13:49) on that great and final day and bring us to stand with him, holy and blameless in God’s sight.

During these first weeks in the new Church year which we call the season of Advent we ready ourselves for the celebration of Christ’s first coming, his birth in Bethlehem even as we await his second coming, his return in power and great glory at the end of time.

Christ’s first coming occurred some 4000 years after it was first promised in the Garden of Eden – God was faithful to his promise to send our Savior and today we are looking ahead to another celebration of his birth. Christ will return again. There is no doubt about that – his first coming as our Savior assures us of his return. It may seem to us that our Lord’s second coming will take place in the distant future. That may or may not be true. What is true is that we are enjoying God’s grace right now. He comes to us with word and sacrament to prepare us for the time when he will call us out of this life. Indeed Christ could come to call us out of this life at anytime even before he returns at the end of time. Our own day of judgment, if you will, is the day that we die. The book of Hebrews reminds us: **... people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...** (Hebrews 9:27 NIV)

When a believer draws his last breath in this life, his soul will be with Christ while his body will remain behind to wait for the glorious resurrection on the Last Day. Whether we are a believer or an unbeliever at the

time of our death will therefore decide for us what will happen on the last day when Christ comes in all of his power and glory.

In anticipation of Christ's coming,

Let Us Enter Another Year of Grace

1. With joy in our hearts
2. With watchfulness and prayer

Amen.

May The LORD Our Righteousness “strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” Amen.