

Be On Guard

November 28, 2021 Sermon by Stephen Portner

Luke 21:25-36

25 "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."

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the time of the year when Christians anticipate the coming of Christ. That anticipation of Christ's coming is two-fold. We remember that Christ has come in the form of human flesh, a day we celebrate as Christmas. We also anticipate the coming of Christ for the second time, a day we anticipate will come at the end of the age. The Second Coming is one that is well-known by Christians, through Scriptures such as the one we read this morning. The Second Coming is also one that you don't hear talked about or preached about all that much, partially because the actual time of the Second Coming is a mystery, and we are a people who like everything sorted out and explained rather than live perpetually with a mystery. The other part about the Second Coming is that the Scriptures, like the one we read today, make it sound so dark and foreboding. Who wants to talk about something dark and ominous-sounding, especially today when we seem to have enough to deal with right now, without having to contemplate what mysterious events our future will hold? But, you see, that's just the point of why we need to talk about this. You can't stop the future from happening just because it may make you feel uncomfortable to talk about it. And, besides that, it was something Jesus talked about, so it is something that he wanted us to know – not only to know, but to prepare for! How are we going to

prepare for something if we do not want to even know what we can about what's in store for us in the future?

What Jesus did share with his disciples and, by extension, through it having been written down for us through Scripture, is important for us to know. Jesus said, **“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.”** When Jesus came the first time to earth, it was a rather quiet and isolated event. Mary and Joseph were present in a stable when Jesus came into this world. A little later some shepherds were told by angels to come to see him. And then, a couple of years later, some Wise Men from the east showed up with gold, frankincense and myrrh to present to him. Only a few at the time knew about Jesus' first coming. The second coming will be quite different. Everybody will know when Christ returns. There will be none of it where other people can claim that they know about Christ's return and you didn't. When Christ comes again there will be cosmic changes in the sun, moon and stars. The kingdoms of this earth will be in upheaval. The sea will roar and be tossed to and fro. Heavenly bodies will be shaken. There will be no doubt that something monumental has happened, and some people will faint from terror. But those who are prepared for Christ's coming will recognize the signs, and rather than faint in terror, they will rejoice that the day of the Lord has finally come!

“At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Did you hear that? Those who are prepared for Christ's coming will “stand up and lift up” their heads! If you have ever watched the Olympics and the Olympian has discovered that she or he has been victorious, they naturally stand up straight and proud, their chins lifted up. And they have reason to do that. They prepared long and hard for that day. They did their best and have triumphed. A victory to celebrate. This is what it will be like for those who follow Christ. It will not be a time to hide in fear or to be ashamed. We will be able to stand up and lift up our heads, not because we are victorious, but that our long awaited Messiah has come again! Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus!

He [that is, Jesus] told them [that is, his disciples] 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.” The purpose of the signs is that they point the way for us that, when they happen, the Second Coming of Christ is drawing near. Just as the

budding of the leaves on a fig tree show that summer is near, so the cosmic signs spoken of by Jesus in this chapter will be a sure sign that Jesus' coming is near. Jesus said, **"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."** Once the cosmic signs occur, a generation of people will not pass away before Christ returns. That is how soon it will be. So, folks, if we happen to be alive when these cosmic signs occur, that means that you don't have much longer to wait. Christ will come before your generation passes away. And it is not that you need to fear that heaven and earth will pass away – because they will – for Jesus has promised us that although heaven and earth will pass away, his words will never pass away. We can trust him, and rely on him, to care for his own. If we call ourselves followers of Christ, we will have nothing to fear.

Unfortunately, there will be those who get tired of waiting. They will fall back to bad habits, and of convincing themselves that Christ will never come. So they won't be prepared and will not be ready when the signs happen and when Christ will come again. Jesus warns us: **"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."** Be alert. Be prepared. Pray for the coming of the Lord. It will be a terrible day for some, but for those who love the Lord, it will be a great day! It will be a day to stand up straight, lift our heads high, and shout out the victory!

Our season of Advent is to serve as a reminder for us. The Grand Advent-ure awaits us. Are we ready? Are we prepared? Unfortunately, many of us have fallen asleep. We have been lulled into inactivity because the world thinks we are irrelevant, boring, and untrue. Instead of being lulled to sleep, we need to pray for a Great Awakening, a time of renewal and for the coming of the Holy Spirit to come upon the church with such power that more and more people take notice and give their lives to the Lord, before it is too late. We as the Church (capital-C Church) have lost our sense of urgency that if we do not prepare ourselves, and in turn prepare others, then generations of people will be lost to the power of sin, fear, shame, guilt, and death. There is no time to waste. The Second Coming of the Lord is coming closer every day. Will we be found sleeping at the wheel? Or will we rise up to proclaim Good News to a world that desperately needs to hear that hope is not only on its way, but is here and now if only they will receive Him?