

November 29, 2009 1st Sunday in Advent Luke 21:25-36

If the future stretched out before you, offering no relief for a problem you face, would despair overwhelm you? If the future held nothing but evil would constant fear overshadow you every day? Today despair and fear grip the heart of many whose crystal ball forecasts nothing but gloom, financial woe, chaos, and eventually the death of humanity is some environmental disaster. Are you also tempted to fear and despair?

At the start of a new church year, it's good to be reminded of the sobering fact that some day soon the world will come to a sudden halt because Jesus will return in glory. At that point the future will no longer be an extension of the present with all its sorrow, pain and suffering. Instead it will offer us a glorious alternative to all the false hopes of this current world. So Christ's people live in hope. **“Live Every Day in Advent Hope!” 1) Our hope for Jesus' Advent is sure. 2) Our hope for Jesus' Advent is blessed.**

Jesus had confided earlier in this chapter, **‘Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.’** Every war, every earthquake, every famine and disease reminds us Jesus will come again on the Last Day to judge all people. More signs would immediately precede His Second Advent. The heavenly bodies, spinning and rotating in the perfect order God built into them at creation, will start to reel and totter as God's almighty hand reaches down to end the present universe.

Jesus also promises, **“I tell you the truth; 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”** (v. 32). That kind of unbelieving Jew, which rejected Jesus at His First Advent in humility, will continue until His Second Advent in glory. And despite the attacks of unbelieving Jews, communists, evolutionists, Muslims... Jesus Word still wins the hearts and guides the lives of people around the world. Nothing can prevent the King of kings and Lord of lords from returning in glory to claim His kingdom, gather His followers into heaven and condemn all who do not believe to their just punishment in hell.

Let's not make the mistake of overlooking the signs of the Last Day that Jesus gives us. Studies show a shocking break-down of the family and morality since the mid 20th century. One of six people on the earth suffers from hunger. Violence is epidemic. A study of wars since 500 B.C. shows a recent dramatic increase. More than 100 conflicts have erupted since 1990, about twice the number for previous decades. There were 10 major earthquakes between 1920 and 1990, a 70-year span. But there were 13 major earthquakes between 1990 and 2005, just a 15-year span. Counterfeit spirituality is everywhere with its cults and false Christ's, psychic phenomena, spiritism, Satan worship, witchcraft, nature worship and the New Age movement. Today many churches deny the eternal truths of Scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit, replacing them with man's philosophies and constantly changing values. God's judgment is indeed coming on a world in rebellion. He cannot deny His nature. He is, after all, perfectly holy and just and demands judgment for sin. False dreams that somehow a new social or political structure will create a utopia here on earth, as Marxism and some Social gospel advocates claim will be shattered. There will be no millennial reign of peace on earth as Christ's little flock continues to minister with the true Gospel in an increasingly hostile world. Read the word. Read the signs – and live in hope, the sure hope Jesus will come again – soon!

And how will people react when He does come? **“Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world”** (v. 26). Some will be so frightened their hearts will literally fail. Imagine their horror when they see their world and everything they had longed for, worked for, and hoped in perish! They will view the One whom they rejected and ridiculed, Jesus in all His glory, the true Son of God, who comes to judge sinful mankind. Panic, anxiety, and dismay will grip those who don't know Him as their Savior. What about you and me? **“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (v. 28). New courage and joy will fill the heart of all believers, for Jesus' Advent means He is coming to deliver us from sin, the devil, and all evil!

But since we live in an unbelieving world, with the devil constantly prowling to destroy us, and our own worst enemy, our sinful flesh still clinging to us, the Lord warns, **“Be careful or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”** Don’t let the sinful pleasures of this world, the mind-numbing effects of over-drinking or drug abuse, or a love for and worries about things in this world deprive you of heaven. **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him,”** writes the Apostle John. Love for the world crowds out true love for God and faith in Jesus. Therefore Jesus urges, **“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”** (v. 36). Imagine God’s eyes piercing as you stand before Him on Judgment Day, penetrating to see every sin you’ve ever harbored in your heart! We cannot stand on our own worth and expect Him to accept us! But by faith in Jesus we will stand righteous on the Last Day. God’s eye sees not our sin, but Jesus’ holiness covering us with absolute purity! By faith the forgiveness of sin Jesus earned for all is ours. Watch, therefore, don’t give in to your sinful desires to doubt Jesus’ threats or His promises. Don’t forsake Jesus for some earthly love. And pray – trusting as use you continue in the Word and Sacrament, the Spirit of God will use those means He has appointed to keep you in faith. Martin Luther commented that God, as a dear Father, dealing with us, His dear children, says, “Repent, believe in My Son. Be obedient and faithful servants in your work. Eat, drink, and use the earthly goods with which I have blessed you. But take care you use the world and its passing goods like someone awaiting the last Day, prepared and ready.” (*Day by Day We Magnify You*, p. 17).

Imagine waking up one day to discover the person you loved most passionately loved you even more? Imagine waking up hearing music you have always loved, but had never heard with such infinite joy. Imagine rising to the new day as if you were just discovering the most beautiful sight you’d ever seen, exceeding the grandeur of a mountain or the awesome beauty of an ocean sunset! Imagine waking up without feeling guilty about anything at all ever again! Imagine seeing to the very core of your being, and liking everything you see! Imagine...wait, this really will happen, even more wonderfully than we can imagine now when Jesus returns to take His own to live in His divine love forever!

Now, what if Jesus stood before us today and said, “I will return to this world next Sunday morning for its final judgment.” How would you live this week? What things, which demand so much of your time now, suddenly would seem unimportant? Would it matter whether we got all the best bargains in a mad rush for pre-Christmas sales? Would you care whether you wore the latest fashions, drove the newest car, lived in the nicest home, had a healthy bank account, got the biggest buck, or won the biggest trophy? What would matter – would be the condition of your soul! What habits, past-times, and ambitions would you change if you knew Jesus was coming next Sunday?

I’m sure we would do more mission work this week than we have done in a life time. How we would plead with loved ones, friends, children, to believe the gospel. Our desire that all men be saved would well up in generous offerings that would send missionaries throughout the globe in the few days remaining. I doubt if we would watch much TV; or play many video games; I doubt if our desire to sleep, to enjoy nature, or to relax in the morning would keep us from church. In fact, I’m quite sure this sanctuary would be crowded every day with all our members and throngs of visitors using every spare moment to find out more about the gift of eternal life the Lord reveals in His Word through faith in Jesus. We would live a week of soul-searching repentance, of service, worship, prayer, witness – and of joyous hope every day as our redemption drew near. What – are we going to live this way only for a week? No, Jesus may return today. So we live this way every day – for a lifetime. Amen.