

Daily Discipleship

First Sunday of Advent (C) – Luke 21:25-36

Imperatives of Discipleship – *Watch!*

Focus Question: What are you watching and waiting for this Advent season?

word of life

“Be on guard, so that your hearts are not weighed down” Luke 21:34 (NRSV)

Read Luke 21:25-36

Happy New Year! No, this greeting is not one month early. This Sunday begins the new church year with the first Sunday in Advent.

1. *How do you observe and celebrate a new year?*
2. *How might you observe and celebrate the new church year?*

Advent has often been understood as a time of anticipation of and preparation for Christmas. Certainly we do look forward to the celebration of the coming of Christ enfleshed in the birth in Bethlehem. But Advent is also a time to remember, anticipate, and prepare for the promised coming of Christ at the end of time.

And so we begin the church year with Jesus’ teaching about the end of all years – the promised and anticipated coming of Christ at the end of the world.

The verses for today from Luke’s Gospel are a part of what is known as “apocalyptic” literature. The word “apocalypse” means “to reveal” or “to unveil.” The literature is mysterious and filled with signs, symbolism, and hidden meaning; and it often is interpreted as teachings about the end of the world. (Perhaps the most well-known example of apocalyptic literature is the last book of the Bible – the Revelation of John.)

The early first-century church believed that Jesus would return in glory as he had promised at the Ascension. (“Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Acts 2:11 NRSV) The early followers of Jesus anticipated this “second coming” to occur in their lifetime. (See 1 Thessalonians 3:13.) They were to live lives of faithfulness, anticipating Christ’s victorious, glorious return.

3. *What images come to mind when you think of the end of the world?*
4. *Are these comforting or disturbing images?*
5. *Do you think the Bible gives clear signs of the beginning of the end?*

As many of the first followers of Jesus began to die and Christ had not yet returned, the early church faced a crisis in faith. How does one live faithfully “in the in-between time”? It is a question the followers of Jesus are to ask yet today.

Jesus speaks of signs of the beginning of the end – natural occurrences, as well as confusion and distress among nations. People throughout history have tried to identify these signs and predict the time of the ending of the world. But Jesus is not concerned about *when* these events will occur. He emphasizes the *meaning* of these signs – “your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28 NRSV) Jesus encourages his followers to be watchful, alert, and ready, always anticipating the coming of Christ.

6. *What does it mean to live expectantly, anticipating the coming of Christ?*
7. *What difference does this attitude make for living in the “here and now”?*

word among us

You might have already heard it. Its melody is sung and played every year at about this time. Its lyrics speak a message of anticipation and expectation. It has also been used as a strategy for eliciting good behavior from little children.

*“Oh, you better watch out! You better not pout! You better not cry!
I’m telling you why: Santa Claus is coming town.”*

We jovially sing this song in this season as we anticipate the coming of a mythical figure bringing reward for those who have been good “for goodness’ sake.” It’s a Christmas song. And, in many ways, it’s an Advent song.

1. *What is the message of the song “Santa Claus is Coming to Town”?*
2. *How does that fit with your understanding of the Advent message?*

We, too, sing in Advent of anticipation and expectation. We sing of One who is coming. We are reminded of how we are to live our lives – watching and waiting, alert for signs of his coming. “Be on guard! Be alert at all times! Stand up and raise your heads!”

3. *How does one wait, anticipating the coming of Christ?*
4. *What will be the signs of the return of Christ?*

While some would fear such a time and wonder what it all means, the followers of Jesus clearly know – the One who is coming is bringing gifts. “Your redemption is drawing near.” (vs. 28) The words to the song are transformed from a message of foreboding and anxiety to one of hopefulness and anticipation. For we know how the song and the story will end.

5. *How does it make you feel when you hear about the end of time?*
6. *What might lessen your anxiety?*
7. *Does knowing that Christ will come again change anything about how you live? Why or why not?*

We can face the troubles and anxieties of this age, for we know that this is not the final word. We can live faithfully and expectantly in the midst of great uncertainty and fear, for we know and trust that Christ is “coming to town.”

Knowing that makes all the difference in the world.

8. *What difference does it make to know the end of the story?*
9. *What can you do to be ready for the return of Jesus?*

Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Grant us expectant hearts, that we might be faithful as we await your coming. Amen

Dig Deeper

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

last word

This week, listen for words of expectation and watchfulness.



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