

The Second Sunday in Advent

Populus Zion

Luke 21:25-36

Jesus is your friend!

Friends aren't afraid to warn friends about danger even if they don't want to hear the warning. I'm sure you've had a friend that has told you something you don't want to hear. But you know that they love you so you try to listen to them. Sometimes it even helps!

Jesus is also a friend to all the people in Jerusalem in His final week of earthly ministry before His crucifixion. He warns them of the impending doom that is to come to Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and He warns us of the impending doom of His coming again in glory. His warning was written down for us as well. Many did not listen in Jerusalem. Many do not listen now. But those who know Jesus loves them heed His Words. And they are always helpful!

Jesus uses language that His first century hearers would be familiar with. Back in that day, you could do most of your teaching with just a Bible, Greek or Hebrew. When the pilgrims landed on North America, they could do most of their teaching with just a Bible. What this meant was that everyone had a common language to talk about faith or anything else, really. One of the problems today is that we have so very little in common, let alone a common language even though most of us speak English. That's why it's so important to find common ground when you're speaking with someone else. I need that reminder more than you!

Anyway, when Jesus says “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 the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken,” (vv. 25-26) He’s using Old Testament Language.

Listen to Isaiah 13:10: “For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.” Isaiah is prophesying God’s judgment on Babylon. God used Persia to destroy Babylon in 539 B.C. Isaiah uses what we call hyperbolic language to describe the heavenly judgment against an earthly kingdom.

List to Isaiah 34:4: “All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their hosts shall fail, as leaves from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree.” Again Isaiah uses hyperbolic language to describe God’s heavenly righteous judgment against an earthly kingdom, Edom, which was south of Jerusalem. God used Babylon to destroy Edom.

When Jesus uses this same language, His hearers would have had Isaiah in mind. Jesus is also using the same hyperbolic language from the Old Testament to describe God’s heavenly righteous judgment against Himself on the cross.

Jesus is your Friend. He dies for you. As Paul says, “For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:7-8) Jesus takes the full wrath of

God on the cross which we cannot face and proves Himself to be a true Friend!

Jesus continues in our Gospel reading, "And then you will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great might." (v. 27) This brings up another Old Testament image: Daniel 7. Listen to the prophet Daniel:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

Daniel is not talking about the second coming of Christ but about His Ascension where He was given dominion, glory, and a kingdom. We confess that in the creed when we confess that Jesus "sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." The right hand of God is not some location out there in space but authority and power over His entire creation.

You might say with all the trouble we're experiencing this year that it doesn't seem like Jesus is in control. The author of Hebrews says, "Now in putting everything in subjection to Him, He left nothing outside His control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to Him... for it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering." (Hebrews 2:8, 10) This is echoed in 2 Peter "the Lord is not slow to fulfill His promises as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach

repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9) Jesus works in the world to promote His Gospel so that all might repent and believe in Him. Judgments like COVID-19 have a way of stripping our idols away from us so that we learn to depend only on Jesus!

You might also say that you don't see Jesus' kingdom covering the whole earth as was promised in Daniel. I heard a great analogy about this from Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller. Have you seen a map of the world or portion of the world where the nighttime lights show? You see light all over the world. Imagine if you had a similar map that showed our faith as light. In the time of Jesus, you would only see light in and around Jerusalem. In the time of Acts, you would see it shine all along the Apostle's journeys. From Jerusalem to Rome to northern Africa and even to India. Today you would see light all over the world. The church is indeed spread to the whole world. Jesus' kingdom which will not pass away, also known as the church, covers most of the world! It will continue to spread until Christ comes again in glory.

Jesus then tells a parable about the fig tree. “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. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.” (vv. 29-32) When we see His death, resurrection, and Ascension, we know that the kingdom of God is near. His kingdom is filled through Holy Baptism and teaching the Word of Jesus. You know the end of Matthew: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.” Sounds like Daniel 7, doesn't it? He continues: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, [that is make members of my kingdom,] baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20) A generation did not pass away before the kingdom of God was established. And Jesus promises us that “heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” (v. 33)

These words of Jesus apply to His work on the cross and His ascension into power, but they also describe His second coming. They can be applied to both. This the great “now and not yet” fulfillment of God’s Word. Jesus fulfilled His Work of winning salvation for us. Yet, we still suffer the ravages of sin in this world and in our flesh. We have salvation now and not yet. Now we have it through faith. He will come again and give us our glorified bodies that have no effects of sin and put us in the kingdom of glory where no sin exists. No COVID-19 or looting or lifetime politicians who only care for their own power. Jesus is our Friend. He will come and save us from this veil of tears.

And since Jesus is our friend, He warns us: “Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.” (v. 34) We will all face judgment. Some of us will face it when we die. Others will face it when Jesus comes again in glory. We will all stand before the Son of Man. We will stand before Him with the filthy rags of our own righteousness or with our baptismal robe of Christ’s righteousness. Jesus warns us so that we don’t get distracted by our passions or drunkenness or cares of this world.

We are physical creatures. It’s easy for us to get distracted. Provisions and alcohol and work and children are great gifts of God for our use. But how

easy it is for us to misuse these gifts and become ensnared by them. How easy it is for us to turn these good gifts of God into idols. Sin promises pure pleasure by misuse of these things and delivers only slavery. And worse, this slavery can lead to eternal damnation. The flesh is an ugly monster and must be drowned by the cleansing waters of baptism.

The disciplines of Advent and Lent are helpful in subduing the flesh. Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving help us to mortify the old man. Jesus teaches us to pray so that we might learn to depend upon Him. Every time our body is stained with the filth of sin, we cry out to God just like David in Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (vv. 1-2) Jesus promises us that His Word will never pass away. This includes His Word of absolution. When He says you are free of your sin, you are! And if you are free of your sin, you can stand before Him on judgment day with confidence that He is your Friend and not your enemy!

Jesus is your Friend now and He will be your Friend forever more! Amen!