

An Unexpected Return

Reading Luke 21:25-33

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

Teaching

On my journey through life with Christ I love the season of Advent which means coming or arrival. Advent is a time for anticipation and preparation of ourselves, our hearts, our homes, and our lives for the coming of God’s only son Jesus. It is also a time when we look outwards to the needs of others in our community spreading Christmas joy with family and friends. But this year Advent will be upside down due to COVID-19 restrictions on all our lives. This is reflected in our church Christmas cards and our upside-down Christmas tree. And it is times like this we gather as a church community to encourage one another to find that glimmer of light in Jesus Christ Our Lord.

This season of Advent I believe offers us a new beginning. A beginning on the road to Bethlehem a beginning in a stable with the good news of Jesus’ birth to bring hope to a darkened world and with the news of a vaccine for COVID-19 the light of the Christmas star begins to shine for better days ahead.

During my own preparation for Advent I love to listen to hymns, during this season which brings spiritual comfort and peace. One of my favourite hymns is “O come O Come Emmanuel”, (which means God with us) it was originally written in Latin with the title of Veni, Veni, Emmanuel, (Matthew 2:22-23), this song reminds me of the Israelites who mourns in lonely exile, until the son of God draws near, this song is a hope that we also can get to rejoice in the glory that is truly the reason for Advent.

This hymn has its roots in a Benedictine Gregorian chant from the late 8th and 9th century. History tells us that the week before Christmas, the monks would gather and chant 7 different truths of the Messiah. The Messiah would be Wisdom, Adonai, root of Jesse, Key of David, Morning Star, King of Nations, and Emmanuel God with us, to prepare their hearts and minds for Christmas. These chants, called Antiphons would declare the truth of Jesus Christ. These chants did more than just recite spiritual truth and declare who Christ is.

These early Christians also invited Jesus to come and be everything he promised, O Come Emmanuel. We see this prophecy about Jesus the Messiah in (Isaiah 7:14), "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel". The promised child was given the name of Jesus but also Emmanuel God with us, (Matt 1:24) and God in the flesh. When we reflect on the words from this song, we rejoice that helps us to place our hearts and minds on Jesus' return by remembering his first coming and then anticipating, hoping, and aching for his second coming.

Our Gospel teaching for this week has its beginning in Jesus' prediction that the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed (Luke 21:5-6) and the disciple's question, "Teacher so when will these things be? What is the sign that these things are about to happen" (v 7)? Jesus responds by telling of wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, and plagues (vv. 9-11), there will be persecutions and Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies (vv. 12-19). Then comes the cosmic signs of verses 25-28 which is where our Gospel lesson begins.

In Luke's Gospel reading this morning we read of the glorious return of our Saviour Christ. The Gospel tells us, Jesus the Son of Man, the one who knows each of us, what we do and what we think is coming in great glory (v27). When Jesus pointed to his second coming, to reconcile the world he realised there would be anxiety, (v25), but Jesus wanted anticipation he tells us that we are to watch for His coming, because we do not know the day or hour of His return (Matt 24:42; 25:13). Jesus wanted his people to stand tall and raise their heads. Jesus wants to bring us, joy, hope and trust this Advent (v28).

Jesus says in verses 25 – 29 "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. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world for the heavenly bodies will be shaken at that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things beginning to take place, stand up and lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near.

In Luke's Gospel we read of this apocalyptic text in which Matthew's (24-29) and Mark's (13:24-26) Gospels closely parallels Luke's version, the original Greek word Apokalypis means unveiling, or revelation. From these texts we find the true spiritual identity of Jesus of Nazareth is revealed, his Sonship, his Messianic statues, and his divinity.

Luke, in his Gospel has recorded the words of Jesus, who is describing his second coming, and three words I believe could summarise this apocalyptic language, cosmic, public, and redemptive. Verse 25 Christ's return will be cosmic, it will affect the entire creation the sun, moon, and the stars, the great lights of the heavens. In this way the sun, moon, and stars are more than objects in the sky. They are a season of change (Genesis 1:14) says, "and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days of years".

Great cosmic disturbances are happening, and it is summarised that this statement in Luke's Gospel for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. This cosmic chaos will cause apprehension about what is coming. This is a sign to call for spiritual alertness. There was no mistaking this Celestial sign in the night sky on the first Advent as the Magi (Matt 2:2) from the East followed the Christmas star. The shepherds in the field at night witnessed the Angel of the Lord who appeared with a bright presence of glory that surrounded the shepherds, and the multitude of the heavenly hosts joined the Angels praising God in the highest.

(Luke 2:9-14). The next characteristic of Jesus' second coming will be public, (v27) "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory". The reference here is to the authoritative return of Jesus.

The allusion to the cloud and the figure comes from Daniel 7:13-14, with its picture of the one who receives authority,

The Ancient of Days. Jesus viewed this text in terms of an apocalyptic deliverance. The image of the cloud is important, since God is identified as riding the clouds in the Old Testament (Exodus 13:21; 34:5). With power and great glory, the Son of Man has divine authority to judge the world to establish an everlasting Kingdom.

The third characteristic of Christ's Advent will be redemptive. (v28) "when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is drawing near".

This is a time as Christians we can rejoice Jesus Christ is coming Lift up your heads for this is a sign of hope and confidence. In the midst of all this crisis in which Luke describes Christians can take heart. The Lord and Saviour is at hand and we know this Advent that Jesus is near to us, and this is part of God's redemption plan to redeem fallen humanity, through the incarnation, crucifixion, and the power of the resurrection. God in Christ accomplished redemption for all of us and to forgive our sins to bring us back to God.

In verses 29-33 we hear the parable Jesus told to his disciples, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so when you see these things happening you know that the

Kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all of these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass- away, but my words will never pass away".

In this parable the coming of the Kingdom of God is something that we should joyfully anticipate rather than fear. Jesus taught us to pray may your Kingdom come (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:1). This is a prayer for Jesus to come again so that he will fully establish God's Kingdom in our world today. The coming of the Kingdom will be a time when all wrongs will be made right, and the people of God will be redeemed from the things that cause them suffering.

How are we to Apply these Texts to Our Lives?

The timing of the events alluded to in Luke's Gospel is not a matter for concern as Jesus affirms this in Luke 21:7-8. There will always be cosmic calamities throughout history there has never been a time without war and conflict, and our personal lives, there will also be some kind of tragedy. Life has always been this way and will continue to be like this always. The point is not to predict the next crisis nor is it to predict the second coming or the end of the world, but as Christians to stand fast, stand firm with our heads held high in faith on the promise of our place in God's kingdom and the presence of Jesus in our personal lives.

I will finish our teaching this morning with a reflection on the lyrics from the advent hymn, O come O come Emmanuel the hymn encourages us to pray for our broken world, which longs for the coming of God with us. O come, Adonai, Lord of might, who to thy tribes, on Sinai's height, in ancient times didst give the law. In cloud and majesty and awe. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. Amen.

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