

Peace Through the Eyes of God

1st Sunday in Advent

December 2, 2012

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. ²⁸Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³²Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁴“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Peace, Hope, Love, Joy...around these four words, we build our Advent season. As we light the candles of Advent, we begin our preparation. Today we light the candle of peace. This small light will blossom in the weeks ahead and as the other candles are lit, it is my prayer that their gleam will ignite God’s love in our hearts as we prepare for the complete light, the light of Christ that is coming into the world.

Every year we talk at this time of preparing ourselves for the coming of Christmas. We talk about rising above the hustle and bustle of business that clutters our lives and keeps our focus from the gift God most wants to give us. It is important that we focus on preparing ourselves, but there may be a more fundamental aspect of our preparation than removing, or attempting to remove, ourselves from the events of the Advent season. That fundamental focus is on how God prepares for Advent.

God does not want us to remove ourselves from the world. As Jesus himself reminds us, “We are in the world, but not of it.” We are called to be involved in our human interests and through those interests we are called to be faithful witness to God’s plan for our redemption and salvation. If, then we are to be witness, it seems important that we understand what we are supposed to witness to. That understanding comes from searching out God’s plan, God’s desire for our lives and for the coming of His kingdom. We need to look at the world through God’s eyes!

That task however may be too large for us to take on at one moment, or even in one season so we are going to start a bit smaller. This year, at Advent we are going to look at Advent through God's eyes! We will look at these four Sundays that are part of our season of anticipation and we will examine the symbolism and significance locked up in each. What is God trying to show us in these weeks? What are we supposed to see? What has God done to prepare these moments for us?

God's preparations have been quite extensive as you might expect. He begins from our future, from our distant future anticipating a time when as the *Book of Revelation* tells us God will dwell with God's people. God always works from our future, and being unbound by time, is able to move closer and closer to us so that He is as near as our next breath or the next beat of our heart. Then in the fullness of time, God breaks in exactly the right way and at exactly the right moment. For us in this season, that time is at the Birth of Jesus, God's own Son! But again, I am rushing the story.

During the next four weeks we will look at the coming of a prophet, John the Baptist; we will look at the annunciation of John's birth; we will look at the revelation of Jesus' birth; and we will finally look at the coming of the Messiah! None of this will seem very linear or sequential to us and that is because it is not! We are not looking at things the way humans look at them, rather we are looking at events the way God sees them. God views the events that must take place in human history in response to human faithfulness. There are many places where our disobedience delay the inevitable result so the line from God's outcome to God's beginning is rarely straight. That does not deter or discourage God. It merely underscores the obvious. This is our Father's world!

So today, we begin with the end of the world! Remember I told you we would start from our distant future...and while the end may seem a strange place to begin, I believe for God, it is the obvious place. God wants us to know what to look forward to, what to be prepared for, what to encourage others to and what better way to communicate these things than to tell us straight out! God turns our world upside down so we can see Him right side up!

Luke, our evangelist would probably be dismayed at our desire to pursue this part of his message first as well. In the first chapter, Luke expresses his goal for the gospel. He wants to give an orderly account of all the things that have happened so that we can come to understand them. How then, he might ask, can we gain order by beginning at the end? God's response is that in order for people to see the work of Messiah through my eyes, they must understand what I am up to. The only way they, or we can understand is for them to know what will happen at the end This revelation will lead them to peace!

And so we begin our advent season with signs in the sun and the moon and the stars above. We begin with people fainting from fear and foreboding and we wonder...how does this impending doom lead us to peace? God's word for peace is shalom. In shalom there is nothing missing, nothing broken. In this moment of conflict in the universe it may seem that there would be much missing. There would be

great confusion and concern on the earth. All the nations would be bewildered at the pounding of the seas, the roaring of the waves! Leadership will be lacking and all will be wondering what we are to do! Where can we possibly find peace in these circumstances?

Not long ago, Hurricane Sandy shattered the normalcy of our east coast. The storm ravaged millions of people and disrupted their lives in ways that we can only imagine. Millions lost power, many lost homes, others lost their lives and all wondered how they would ever clean up and have their normal restored! Governor Christie and President Obama visited the area and made big promises about how quickly life would be returned to its previous status and everyone applauded. Then leadership left and the work of actually restoring life began. What the people recognized in the restoration project was that life could never be restored, it could only be renewed! Things could never be returned to the way they were, they could only be allowed to move forward from where they are.

One of the problems we have as humans is that we want to fix things so they can go backwards. God does not work from our backwards but only from our forwards! He invites us to move forward and sometimes we do so quickly as in the case of devastation from a storm or other natural disaster. Other times however, we move forward much less quickly like when we are victimized by crime, or abuse, or loss through death or broken relationships. As we contrast these kinds of events, we recognize what God really wants us to know about loss. Property and possessions are easily replaceable and quickly forgotten. The people who come into our lives are much more precious and the renewal process requires even greater leadership.

When the pillars of our heavens are greatly shaken and we are tempted to faint from fear and foreboding we need more than promises of restoration. We need leadership that will guide us forward, into a new reality. In those moments when it seems as if all that matters, our whole world is crumbling around us, we need more than a promise of money being thrown at our problems. We need a solid rock of stability that we can count on!

The scripture passage this morning tells us that is exactly what God is planning from our future. When the pillars of our heavens are shaken and we are confused and confounded, then...then we will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds in great power and glory! We do live in a world that is beaten and battered and broken and we do want it to be fixed. World leaders can solve the physical problems of our world. They are great but they are fixable. Once fixed, they will be forgotten, only to be remembered when we enter into the next round of physical problems. Problems of this world are only temporary.

Problems of the lasting kind, problems of broken relationships, broken loves, broken lives require a more lasting leadership. That is why Jesus tells us this morning that when we see these things happen we are to stand up, lift our heads and make ourselves known. When we recognize Jesus coming, we can

...we must profess our faith. He will be the one who redeems us, and all who long for this kind of peace, this kind of healing must know that it can only come from Him!

Peace comes when we put our trust in God. Even in the midst of brokenness, in the moments we cry out, peace, peace and there is no peace...even in these moments we are called to lift our heads are cry out the Good News! God promises in these moments that we can look and He will be there! He promises that we will not be restored, but that we will be renewed!

I received an e-mail story this week that helps illustrate this point. It seems that there was a woman walking through the homeless sections of a major city. She was looking for someone so she was not wandering aimlessly. Suddenly she came upon the person. She stared for some time. Her stare made the man become uncomfortable. You know how it is when you want to remain un-noticed. The last thing you want is for someone to stare at you. It is like when you come in late for church and try to slip in the back row and the preacher catches you and stares. You feel uncomfortable and totally conspicuous. That was the kind of stare the woman had for the man, a stare of recognition that the man did not want.

The man lashed out at her. He told her to go away, but the woman asked if he was hungry. The man said sarcastically, no, "I've just come back from a fine four course meal!" The woman ignored his sarcasm and took his arm. He resisted and as he did, a police officer came by and asked if there was a problem. The woman said no, I am just taking this man over to that restaurant to get a meal. The homeless man shrugged her off and told her again to leave him alone, but the woman gave the police officer a look that said, "I am going to do this with or without your help." The police officer took the other mans arm and together, he and the woman led the man reluctantly to the restaurant. They arrived between breakfast and lunch and the place was not very crowded.

A waiter came over and when he saw the man, he acted less than enthusiastic. He took the order but did not turn it in, perhaps hoping the group would leave. After awhile, the woman sought out the manager and said, "do you know any one from Ellie Bank and Trust?" The manager said, yes, they come in here each week and use our banquet room. Many of their vice presidents come in to entertain clients the rest of the week. The woman said, I am Ellie, president, C.E.O., and chairperson of the board at Ellie Bank and Trust. Upon hearing this, the manager personally waited on the table and the service was excellent.

The police officer laughed and said, "you sure put them in their place." The woman said, "if I did, it was unintentional." I just wanted to take care of this man. The homeless man then looked at her and said, "why." The woman said, you don't recognize me do you? The man answered that she looked familiar. At that point the woman refreshed his memory. She said, "when I was 21 and had just finished college, I came in through that door over there and was hungry. I asked you if I could work for something to eat.

You told me it was against company policy and then you fixed me the biggest roast beef sandwich I had ever seen, sat me in the corner and told me to enjoy. I was concerned that you might be fired for a policy violation until I saw you put the money for the food in the cash register yourself.

I came today because I heard you were down on your luck and that you could use some help. After we finish eating, I am going to take you to our personnel department and we will find something you can do.

Jesus tells us that we must be prepared to receive him! Peace will only come with Him and He is the only one who can bring it. We must not get so caught up in the temptations or the worries of this world that we miss His coming. This year at Advent, we find peace as we are willing to let go of our own desire to be in control. The homeless man had to recognize once again that he was a person of worth before he could receive what the woman had to offer. We must recognize also that we are people of incredible worth to God. In Isaiah 43: 1-7, God tells us he has paid an incredible price for us because He loves us and we are worth that love. He redeems us but not into that which was, he redeems us into that which will be!

Peace is in the future. There is no peace in the present. Instead, there is the opportunity to proclaim recognition of the coming of the son of man. Look around! Are there signs in the sun and the moon and the stars? Are people fainting from fear and foreboding? Are people broken, beaten, battered? Stand up! Speak out! Let them know that a leader is coming who will bring peace; a peace which will pass all understanding.

God does not bring a peace from the past. The storms can never be un-stormed. The waves can never un-pound the shore but in the changing landscape there can be a renewal, a new heaven and a new earth; a place where God can and will dry every tear and where we can live in God's presence forever! Since this peace is not restored, but rather renewed, I propose that we look at it differently. Since this peace comes from the future, I propose that we receive it differently.

Renewal still implies that something was before, or at least that it existed before. Revolution implies that change will restore an order. What God wants us to see at Advent is that He is working to create a new heaven and a new earth. Pronewal invites us to be in favor of the new, to be for it, to embrace it and to eagerly work for it. Provolution invites us to make changes that will enhance the future, that will prepare it for a totally different and desirable outcome!

Proaction suggests that we will not miss the day of the coming of the son of Man. Proaction suggests that we will receive strength from that which is about to happen so that we do not get caught up in that which has already happened. Proaction suggests that we look forward to a kingdom of God where there

is nothing missing, there is nothing broken because Christ is with us always and is working actively among us for justice and righteousness!

God's peace at Christmastime is a recognition not of what was, but what is. God's peace at Christmas time makes real the possibility of virgin birth, acceptance of the unacceptable, and recognition of the promise that our day of redemption is at hand! May you know this Peace Through God's eyes this year at Advent.

Amen!

Next Week: Scripture: Luke 3: 1-6. Message: *Hope Through God's Eyes!* As we continue through Advent, we try to refocus. How does God see hope? It is more than a wish and a whim. Hope is Joyful expectation! How will we receive this hope at Christmas? What is God calling us to do? Come and Worship! Come and See!