

**November 28, 2021. Rev. Katheryn McGinnis**

Let us pray,

God of the stars and God of our hearts— our days will pass, but your words will last.  
The earth might fade but your words will last.

Our memories might blur but your words will last. The grass will wither but your words will last.

The sky could go dark and your words would last.

So as we listen today, help us to hold onto what will last. Help us hold onto you.

Gratefully we pray, amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 21, verses 25 - 36. Listen now for the word of the lord.

**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. **26** People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **27** Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. **28** Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” **29** Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; **30** as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. **31** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. **32** Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. **33** Heaven 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 does not catch you unexpectedly, **35** like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. **36** Be 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.”

**The Word of The Lord. Thanks be to God.**

Our scripture this morning opens with a world in peril. Jesus is foretelling a world in peril. And to those around him, he foretells the signs of this world in peril.

There are signs in both in the physical earth: the sun, the moon, the stars, the waves.

And there are signs in humanity: distress among nations, people faint with fear and foreboding. This world Jesus describes feels like a foreign world, worlds way.

A world we cannot imagine. And yet... maybe it is not so far away at all.

We see the signs of this world Jesus foretells in the physical earth, our earth today: climate change warming our world that causes chaos. Fires burning more boldly and treacherously, ice melting more drastically - storms spreading havoc.

We see the signs in humanity today: nations in distress against each other, in distress divided amongst themselves.

People faint with fear and foreboding. Afraid of the ways the Covid19 pandemic has shocked the world, afraid of yet another new variant spreading, and afraid of what the earth will look like, what our lives will look, if it continues to warm.

And, yet, on this first Sunday of Advent: our liturgical calendar calls for hope.

Why pick this scripture rooted in calamity and destruction to inspire hope? Why pick it to begin the advent season - a season where we wait for Christ's arrival - Do we want Christ to arrive in destruction and calamity?

Our scripture reading for today is part of a larger narrative section in the Gospel of Luke, where it portrays Jesus as teacher. He is teaching to all those around him.

And the passage leading up to this part in the narrative emphasizes Jesus's status as the faithful interpreter of God's agenda. If we want to understand Jesus's teaching as the faithful interpreter of God's agenda, how we read, from what lens we read this particular passage through is important.

Willie James Jennings, a theologian and professor at Yale University, writes of two ways that people often interpret this text that are not very fruitful. That limit us from understanding Christ as the faithful interpreter.

The First - is that some interpret Jesus only as a figure in human history and in Israel's history. In other words, Jesus is just another prophet to predict or prematurely imagine the coming end of times. And this limits Jesus - because we should not read Jesus against the backdrop of human history, but instead - it should be the reverse - we should read human history against the backdrop of the life of Jesus.

The Second, less fruitful way of interpreting this passage is to obsess over the idea of interpreting signs. All of us trying so hard to pinpoint the exact connections between his words and world events in explicit detail.

No, Jesus' words are meant to focus attention not on events, but on his life in our time, and our lives in his future.

These two less fruitful interpretations try to see Jesus and his words through our lens of time. Instead, we need to see Jesus and his words through the time of Jesus.

In God's time. A time that is not limited to a mere linear timeline that we are able to understand.

God's time is of its own accord: where both past and future are woven into the fabric for the sake of the present. for the sake of today.

To this, Jennings writes: "Jesus embodies God's own direction of our lives, not only in our space but also in our time." When we, in faith, try to read this foretelling, this world Jesus describes through Jesus' time and not our own, we see hope start to break through the cracks of the wall that our linear time builds.

We see that even though Jesus foretells of a world in peril - God is present in that world. God is near. That this world too, is part of God's plan. That God works through it and brings redemption. And there is hope that while our understanding of time might see this as far away into the future - Jesus tells us that this world is not in our understanding of distant, linear future, but a time yet to come. This time that is near but not yet.

But in this tension of waiting for the near but not yet, God brings redemption. God's kingdom on Earth is at once both near and not yet.

This feeling of near and not yet, perhaps we know it as homesickness.

This Advent season, many are homesick.

For some, the anticipation of reuniting with those we love makes us homesick.

For others, perhaps the pandemic means they will be not be able to be with the ones they love, and thus are homesick.

Perhaps others have lost the ones they love this year, and are thus homesick for the times they once shared.

We're homesick together too. Homesick for a world that doesn't feel broken and divided. For a world that feels whole.

But we're perhaps most homesick for our home in God's kingdom. A kingdom which is both near and not yet. We know it is near and not yet because we see glimpses of it.

We see God breaking in to a homesick world in the promise of the sunrise each and every morning.

No matter how we abuse each other and the earth - each day the sun rises. A reminder that God is present, breaking into our world and bringing redemption.

We see it in the love we have for each other, a love that reflects the image of God. We see this all, even within disaster.

In our scripture for today - Jesus boldly charges us to have hope. Hope that what is to come - the kingdom of God - will come in God's time. A time where past and future are woven together in the fabric of the present.

This means we need not look to the future with fear and foreboding for the coming of the Son of Man. We need only look around us with Joy.

A joy that is not rooted in our own individual happiness because everything that is broken is fixed. But a bold joy rooted in faith - faith that despite the perils that surround us, we embrace this world with God's love.

Because, as Jennings describes - "in Christ we find a God who never keeps safe distance from chaos, holding the world at arm's length, but who will never be overcome by it. Jesus invites us to bring our lives into the divine life by following God's time."

The art on our bulletin cover today is titled "awake to wonder." The artist, Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, when creating this art, says she imagine a scene of chaos and apocalypse.

But as she drew a woman lifting her head and reaching for the fig tree - she says she began to see a vision of beauty and hope - a glimpse of one's whole being awake to wonder.

Let us all, when reading today's scripture - be faithful to Christ the interpreter, and approach it with wonder. Wonder that God could and does enter such a world - a homesick world - and bring redemption.

This scripture *is* chosen for the first Sunday of Advent *because* it is filled with this hope of God's kingdom which is both near and not yet. It is to come.

But the beauty of living our lives in God's time means we need not look to the future to see it.

We need only have faith to see God's kingdom breaking in to the here and now.

And it will always - no matter the chaos, no matter the calamity.

And for that - thanks be to God!