

This Sunday's texts:

Jeremiah 33:14-16
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36

Advent Hope**Pastor Jim Cords****November 28, 2021**

The holy gospel for this first Sunday in Advent comes to us from the Gospel of Luke, the twenty-first chapter:

"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. People 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 begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." He told them this parable: "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. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close in on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

The gospel of the lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, give us hearts, faith, minds, and lives that are fully trusting in you and filled with the hope of the good news of the gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I have a distinct memory in junior high school. It was, I think, maybe the one and only time our church from southern California went to Hume Lake. I really enjoyed my week there, but there were a couple of challenges. One of the challenges was they separated the junior high camp from the senior high camp and the two were not to mix. I am the little brother and I was in the junior high camp. My brother, Jack was in the senior high camp. I remember how it felt when he snuck out of the senior high camp to visit me in the junior high camp. I loved it! I thought that was great. It told me that I was important to my brother. I thought it was fabulous. I don't remember the speaker, but I remember what the speaker did and, with no profanity intended from the pulpit, it was clearly his intent to scare the hell out of us. That is, to so scare us about the end times, about this expectation of how the world

would end that we would turn our lives to Jesus in fear. But what I want to say to you is that's not the intent of the scripture as it points to the end times. Listen again to these words in Luke 21. "There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish" - that doesn't sound very fun – "and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea." - that is, everyone except for the big wave surfers; they're going to be happy here – "People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."¹ Does that sound to you like a hope gospel? It doesn't really. It's kind of terrifying.

Part of that this literature is suggesting is that all of the things around us that we count on for stability in the midst of so many things that seem to lack stability will be shaken. I was a strange kid. When I was ten years old and the big earthquake hit Los Angeles, I remember, as the room started to shake, I instantly woke up and instantly remembered what we were supposed to do. We had been trained, you know, although my brothers and my parents seemed to have forgotten at that moment. So I raced into my parents' room, woke them up, and told them to stand in the doorway. And I raced back into my brother's bedroom, woke him up, and dragged him into a doorway. I went back into my bedroom and grabbed my other brother who still wasn't up. I went back into my parents' room and made sure they were standing in the doorway. And the earth was still shaking. How many of you are transplants to the state of California? [Hands raised] How many of you who are transplants were pretty nervous at the feel of your first earthquake? It kind of shakes the foundations of what you think of as stable, but for me, earthquakes didn't do that.

I'll tell you the one thing that really, really shook me up. It happened at the end of the school year when I was a sophomore and my brother Jeff was a senior. The next morning we couldn't wake him up. He had overdosed. We called the ambulance and they were able to revive him and he's fine and living and doing well now. But I remember it shattered my world a bit. What must I have missed if my older brother has so little hope that he doesn't even want to go on? It really shook me.

When the scripture talks about the end times, often it's dealing with what is known as apocalyptic literature. And when it's talking about the end times, it actually wants to tell you something and that is, in the end times, evil and darkness will be destroyed. It wants to let you know that the promises of God will stand for his people. So while it may be the end of the earth, it's not the end of you because you have an eternity beyond death which can instill in you a hope in the midst of

¹ Luke 21: 25-26

the chaos. That's how come when we see a weird text like this in Luke, we can call this Hope Sunday. But I'll tell you, even as a pastor, it's still often hard for me to read that and think hopefully.

Jeremiah said it this way. "The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.'"² The Old Testament is filled with reminders to God's people. It's reminders to look back at how God has been faithful to the people in the past and understand that that faithfulness is also applying to you. The hard things that God brought them through, he will also bring you through, so you too can be a people of hope because we have a God who keeps his promises. At that camp, when I was a junior higher, the preaching reminded me of the mistakes I've made. The preaching made me question whether I was on God's side or the loser side because when we're preaching about this destruction, we're talking about the destruction of the enemies of God.

When we're talking about this destruction and this chaos, we're talking about destroying all those things that stand against God. And that's not you because God has chosen you as his own. By faith, you are a part of God's family. You're on the winning side. So when it feels like you're losing, when it feels like life is chaos, when it feels like things are going all wrong, you remember but God has got me and God has got the future. So this stuff doesn't have to shake my world because my hope and my faith are rooted in the faithfulness of a God who keeps his promise. Luke 21:33 says it this way this morning. "My words will never pass away." It said in the midst of all this destruction of the earth, the roaring of the planets and the waves, it's saying God's word will never pass away. That's the source of our hope. That's the source of our promise.

So the question is what are we relying on? And when the things around us that we're relying on, that we're counting on to give us a sense of stability in our lives, when they begin to shake, we're reminded. My confidence is not in the ground. My confidence is not in the stars, the sun, and the moon. By the way, you know that the sun and the moon represent the calendar as well. It represents time. We tell time through the movement of the planets and so if they get disrupted, what else gets disrupted? Time.

But our hope is rooted somewhere else. The words to the people of Judah and Jerusalem are this. "I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land."³ It's a promise that the Messiah will come in the line of David and you know what the problem

² Jeremiah 33:14

³ Jeremiah 33:15

with that promise is? God apparently did not talk to Steve Jobs. Because my Apple watch and God's timing are not in sync. While God makes this promise to the people of Israel, you know what then they have to do? Wait. By the way, I blame Azusa Pacific University for my impatience. Azusa Pacific University does not have lines in the cafeteria. They use the scramble method and it works great. So ladies and Al, those of you who work in the kitchen in Selbo Hall setting up meals and stuff, when you set up a table of food and you have us walk on one side of that table, you got to know. I don't like lines. I figure there's no reason we can't be walking on both sides of the table. I hate lines. Anybody with me on this? Am I alone? Oh, good. Thank goodness. Carl, thank you, brother.

Except sometimes when I'm standing in line, I start to visit with somebody and I actually get to know a bit about their story and I get to know who they are. That's been an amazing blessing here at Saint Timothy's. To stand in line at St. Timothy's means I have a few moments when I get to know somebody new and it ends up blessing my socks off.

That's kind of the way God is too. He is at work in the midst of the waiting. We don't have to wait with fear of what is to come. We can wait with an anticipatory hope. We can wait in a sense of hope that can give us joy in the waiting, knowing that God is at work, that God's timing will be at work, and that we don't have to worry about it. So in the midst of the waiting, God might be working in us or through us or through others.

There was another deficiency in my faith early on. I mean it was great. Let me tell you. It saved me in a lot of ways, but there was some deficiencies looking back. Nobody at my house that I lived in was really following the Lord. They weren't going to church. They weren't doing anything. The only one who I could count on was Grandma and she sat about there [pointing to the right side, halfway back]. Leslie, I would be sitting where Tony is sitting right next to my grandma every Sunday morning, second service, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Lynnwood. She was the faithful one. But because of that, I thought faith was all about me and Jesus. I thought this [pointing to himself] is what needed to be right and this [pointing around the sanctuary] was all superfluous. And as a matter of fact, I was a little skeptical of the church, especially the Lutheran church. Is it really evangelical enough? We really read our Bibles enough? But now I know different.

Now I know part of the heartache of the last twenty months has been the distance between the believers because I have discovered that my faith is often strengthened by you. My faith is often encouraged when I am in conversation with you. Sometimes it's when you come alongside me and

help me out. Sometimes it's when I'm able to come alongside you and help you out. The nature of the body of Christ together is what brings that encouragement.

Apocalyptic literature was written to God's people when they were being oppressed under the authority of another power. All of that apocalyptic language was intended to say those people in power, they're going to lose their power. They're going to be destroyed. You, people of God, you, the body of Christ, together, you can remain hopeful in the midst of that chaos because, in the end, God wins. That means, in the end, you win. We win. But in the midst of it, we need one another, to be encouraged in faith. In the midst of it, we need one another to strengthen and to lean on through the chaos and uncertainty. We need little brother running between rooms to get us to stand in the doorway in the midst of the threat.

Listen to these words. "And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."⁴ You know, we focus on the sun and the moon being shaken. We focus on the wars and rumors of wars. We focus on the fear and the threat that people around us feel, but what we're told is then when that happens, the Son of Man will come with power and great glory. And he's on your side. Jesus is coming back for us. So no matter what is happening in the world, we don't fear. We have anticipatory hope.

Listen to the way 1 Thessalonians puts it this morning. "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."⁵ This is what it doesn't say. It doesn't say may you strengthen your hearts by reading your Bible every day. It doesn't say may you strengthen your hearts by coming to church every week. It doesn't say may your hearts be strengthened by giving money to Water Missions or filling up Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes. Because you know what happens when we look in the mirror? We see, no matter what we've been doing, where we fall short. We look back in our lives at those shortcomings and when we're counting on ourselves, we got a problem. That's called misplaced hope. But here, Paul says may the Lord make your love increase for one another.

Someone, this morning between services, was saying they have a relative and they're not getting along. And this person said "I don't want to get along. I don't like them. They bother me. What should I pray?" [Pastor laughs] You're asking me what you should pray? Well, here's the

⁴ Luke 21:27 (ESV)

⁵ 1 Thessalonians 3:12

answer: that God would change your heart. That's what you need to pray. That God will allow you to see them the way he sees them. That God will allow you to love them the way he loves them because that's what they need from you now, not your correction, but your love. So that's what your prayer is about. It's not about them. It's about you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other. In this season, 20 months of Covid and who knows how long it's going to last, in this season of uncertainty, may the Lord increase your *love* for one another. And then listen to what else God will do. May he strengthen your heart, so that you will be blameless when Christ returns. That pastor that was preaching at Hume Lake was saying hey look, if you're not right with God when he comes back, you're in trouble. But here, Paul says to the church in Thessalonica, may God strengthen your heart so that when Jesus comes back, you stand before him righteous because he's made you righteous, because he's made you holy, because he holds you and your future. So no matter what is going on in the world, we, God's people, are a people of hope because of the promise and faithfulness of God. Jesus is our hope. He is our security. He is our certainty. He is the one in whom we trust. He's the one we turn to and then we turn to one another to be encouraged in our faith, to be strengthened in our faith because there will be times when we doubt, when we struggle, when we get overwhelmed by life.

If you're a believer in Jesus, hold up your hand. If you've never doubted, put down your hand. Well, if you've *never* doubted, put down your hand. Well, some of you are doing pretty good then. I don't know what to say about that. We need each other because the vast majority of us doubt occasionally and maybe it depends on how you define doubt, right? Like how bad is the doubt? The question is how can we have hope in the midst of a world of chaos and the one is to allow God to make us right with him and the other is to allow God to increase our love for one another, so that we're encouraged in the faith, so that we wait with joyful anticipation. We wait knowing that God is good and he's bringing good. We wait knowing that, yeah, the Earth may end, but heaven awaits us. Our future is secure. As Christ comes back, he has made us right with him. And so we celebrate the goodness of God together and we show that celebration, that steadfastness to a world that needs to see hope in God's people, to a world that needs to see hope in us, today and tomorrow. Thanks be to God. Amen.