

“STAND UP”

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Luke 21:25-36 Dec. 2, 2018

*“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among the nations confused by the roaring of the seas and the waves...”*

Okay, I know what you are thinking...or at least I think I do! This is the first Sunday of Advent and what does that scripture have to do with Advent and Christmas?!?! Our thoughts already have turned toward putting up the Christmas tree and decorating our homes. Yesterday the UMW had their annual bake sale to raise money for Christmas mission projects. So here we are...Over the course of the next few weeks, Christians will gather in special worship services, and everywhere we go there are reminders that Christmas is coming. Frankly, on this first Sunday of Advent, we all would rather hear a message about Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus. Why does the church encourage us to consider this passage from Luke today?

Well, first of all, the church understands that many of us need a wake-up call at this time of year. It is so easy to become distracted by the shopping, the stressful traffic jams, and the endless parties that we miss out on the “peace on earth and good will to all people.” “Wake up and don’t miss out on the coming of Jesus!” is the first message of Advent.

Rev. Dr. Bill Britt from the Peachtree Road United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, tells this story:

When I was about ten years old, my daddy and I were invited to go on a father-son camping trip. We were going with four other fathers and sons to a rustic cabin on the Flint River. We would leave our school on Friday and return late on Sunday afternoon. I do remember overhearing my mother reminding my daddy that there was a special service at the church that Sunday night, and she expected us all to be there. Apparently, an actor was going around the South portraying Jesus and on Sunday night he would be at our church. My dad said it would not be a problem and off we went.

It was a good week-end. The cabin was really just a concrete block square building with only one room. There was no electricity or running water. We built fires, fished, hiked, and took turns shooting at targets with a twenty-two rifle. We stayed up very late and listened as our dads told ghost stories. It was a great time.

We must have arrived home later-than-expected on Sunday because my mother was in a panic. We were supposed to be at church in just a few minutes, and there was barely time to shower and change clothes. She said the place would be packed and fretted that we wouldn’t be able to get a seat. Finding a seat had never really been a problem before at our church except on Easter, but I do remember getting there and seeing a very large crowd. I guess a lot of people wanted to see Jesus.

After a couple of songs from the Cokesbury hymnal, the preacher introduced Jesus, and out he came---long beard, flowing hair, and wearing a white robe—just as I had always imagined. Well, that is all I remember because I immediately fell asleep. I had slept so little on the camping trip that my eyes would not stay open. I never heard a word Jesus said. In a sense, that has haunted me for all these years. Jesus came to my home church, and I slept right thru it.

What I want you to know today is that the season of Advent is a spiritual wake-up call. Through the reading of the scripture lesson, you can almost hear the alarm clock ringing.

Now, not only does Advent try to wake us up, but it also invites us to look in *two* directions—back upon the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and forward to Jesus’ return. In other words, we begin by looking deep into the future—to the end

of history.

If we are going to stick with what the scriptures say about Christ's return, then the first thing we must say is that nobody knows the day or hour of his return—I repeat, nobody! One of the most radical statements in the Bible is found in Matthew and Mark's account of Jesus' words in the temple: "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36) Did you catch that? Not even Jesus knew when the end of human history will come. Only the Father.

Lots of folks focus on Jesus' words in today's text: "Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." (Luke 21:32) People like Hal Lindsey and Tim La Haye have supposed that Jesus was speaking about the generation of people who saw the reconstitution of the *state* of Israel in 1948. In 1970, Hal Lindsey wrote a book entitled *The Late Great Planet Earth*. On its pages, Lindsey cobbled together prophetic passages from the Old and New Testament that led to the prediction that Christ would return by the year 1988. The book sold over 28 million copies! Well, when 1988 came and went and Christ did not return, they merely adjusted their numbers to buy a few more years. Now over twenty-five years later, we're still waiting. I think some people worry so much about these things because they want to prove that the Bible is true. If they can show that the Bible predicted something that would happen 2000 years later, they believe that people will pay attention to it.

Now listen carefully. The Bible doesn't need proofs to make it true.

The Bible reveals God to us through Jesus Christ and that makes it true! One way of looking at this is that the events Jesus predicted have already taken place. In the year 70 AD, the Roman empire invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and the earth shook with violence. Jesus warned the disciples that life would be difficult for all who sought to serve God in his time, and that certainly came true. So in this interpretation, we have been living in the last days for nearly two thousand years.

Christ could return at any time. You have heard many other interpretations of "the end times." But for sure, no one knows.

Our suggested reading for this first Sunday in Advent goes on to proclaim that Christ's return is a source of hope. There are many who use the sights and sounds of the apocalypse to scare people into faith. However, this is not our Lord's way: "Now when you see these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Do you hear that? In the *midst* of tragedy, in the *midst* of war and rumors of war, in the *midst* of oppression and poverty, in the *midst* of our own personal losses, we can raise our heads and look for the Lord because he is near. That is the message of Advent.

In the beginning God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Where was God? In the darkness. Moses went up into the darkness that covered Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Where was God? In the midst of the darkness. On Easter morning, while it was still dark, Jesus rose from the dead.

Where was God? In the darkness. Advent is a season in which we remember that we are a people of hope. We are the Christmas people. We sing to Emmanuel because God is with us. When we sense that we are lost in the darkness, Advent reminds us that we are not alone. The God of hope is with us. Jesus warns us not to get distracted by the worries of this world. Lift up your eyes and look upward toward God because even in the midst of difficult times our Lord comes to us.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Romans 13:11) Those are good words.

So let us wake up, be alert, and stay on guard. Lift up your eyes to the Lord and Stand Up to face him, for your redemption is drawing near..

*Let us pray.* Gracious God, for this season we are grateful. Wake us up. In the midst of this season, help us to hear your voice, sense your presence, stand up to face you and worship you. May we serve you in both word and deed. This we

pray in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

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