



THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 2, 2018

LUKE 21: 25-36

“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. ³⁰When 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. ³³Heaven 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 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.”

- A priest and a pastor are standing by the side of the road holding up a sign that reads, “the end is near! Turn yourself around now before it’s too late.”
- The plan was to hold up the sign to each passing car.
- “you guys are religious nuts!” Yelled the first driver as he sped by. From around the curve, they heard screeching tires and then a huge splash.
- The priest said to the pastor, “do you think we should just put up a sign that says ‘bridge out?’”
- From the time of Jesus to today, we have been confronted with the reality that Jesus expected the world to end either in his lifetime or shortly thereafter. But, clearly it didn’t. And so, ever since, followers of Jesus have had to wrestle with “what do we do now?”
- One somewhat cynical new testament scholar said, “the early believers expected the return of Christ and what they got instead was the church.”
- Not quite the same thing.

- Think of your anticipation for Christmas as a child. Santa is coming. Maybe down your chimney. And Santa will bring what? A new bike? Play station4 or Xbox? An American girl doll?
- Expectation! Hope! A sense of urgency! Will Christmas never come??!!
- And then it does and....
- Socks? Pajamas?
- Whether we are the early followers of Jesus anticipating the end of time or having to deal with our four-pack of tidy whities for Christmas, we have to come to terms with what do we do with our time?
- The season of advent tries to hold all of this emotion with a three-fold urgency:
- Christ has come. Christ comes again this Christmas. And Christ will come at the end of all things.
- And, in some way, the first and central question running through all our life is “can I trust fully entering life?”
- In the early part of the 20th century, orphanages were overrun with children. And there were not enough caretakers for all the orphans. So, it became common practice to prop up an infant with a bottle in the corner of a sofa with a couple of pillows.
- What we discovered is that a significant number of these infants died. They were sheltered, they were clothed, they were fed, but it was not enough for them to experience enough trust to continue living. They died of emotional and relational neglect....
- The first task of life is discovering whether or not life is trustworthy enough to continue living.
- In my work as a pastoral psychotherapist, I guess I would say that my “specialty” is working with people who have experienced trauma. Simply stated, trauma is an experience that is too overwhelming to be able to be processed while it is happening: any kind of abuse as a child. Being a soldier in any war, from Vietnam to the present. Divorce is traumatic for children. Poverty is traumatic. Being exposed to violence. Neglect. Being propped up with a bottle in the corner of a sofa.
- But, for the most part, every human being on a planet is exposed to some level of trauma in daily life. Most people now carry some level of trauma.
- And so, there is anxiety. Will that odd guy at work do something because he was fired? Who is that strange looking guy in the movie theater? Our hearts stop when someone starts acting up on our flight to see our grandchildren.
- Even our children. Is it safe to go to school without getting bullied? Is our daughter going to get serially defamed on social media?
- Being a person, myself, who has experienced a number of traumatic events, i carry some symptoms of ptsd. And if we have experienced trauma, our capacity to trust is compromised.

- Make an intuitive leap with me. A significant number of people who risk visiting a new congregation are doing so because they are experiencing some level of trauma: a death in the family, a divorce, the loss of a job, a marriage in trouble, a child who is struggling.
- Even what we might call normative trauma, like a new marriage. Why do you think brides cry? Because they're happy??!!
- And we each have a beautiful responsibility when someone visits clc. Ours is the face of god saying "welcome—introducing yourself—making the stranger comfortable."
- We are actually saying, "take the risk to trust us. We're trying our best to be trustworthy people of god...."
- One of the hallmarks of being raised in a dysfunctional family is that we learn to put our lives in the hands of untrustworthy people. As a child, if dad smacked us upside the head every day, we associate that smack with fatherly love. And then we go out to find someone who will love us by doing the same. So, all of us, having been raised by broken human beings, have some work to do in figuring out who and what is trustworthy and untrustworthy.
- We cannot look for healing at the feet of those who broke us.
- Putting both feet into life is not for the weak of heart.
- I think of the pastor who was walking by a pet shop one day when he noticed a sign in the window: "Christian horse for sale."
- He always had wanted to learn to ride, so he went into the shop and the store owner shows him a beautiful Arabian horse.
- He agreed to let the pastor take the horse for a "test ride," telling him, "this is a Christian horse. If you want him to move, you shout, 'praise the lord.'"
- "if you want him to stop, say 'amen.'"
- The pastor saddled up the horse, shouted, "praise the lord," and the horse took off. They were having a nice trot in the country when the horse, spooked by a rattlesnake, reared up and bolted.
- Up ahead, the pastor saw that they rapidly were approaching a cliff. He shouted "whoa," but the horse kept going. He shouted "stop," but the horse raced faster toward the cliff.
- Finally, at the edge of the cliff, the pastor remembered and shouted, "amen."
- The pastor, thankful he had been saved, raised his hands to the sky and shouted, "praise the lord."
- The original meaning of the word "religion" is to take into careful account.
- To take into careful account.
- It matches perfectly with the season of advent and it matches perfectly with our first and forever primary task of life: learning to trust.
- To take into careful account—who can i trust and who can't i trust.
- To take into careful account. Wake up! Watch! Be observant!

- To take into careful account. Where is god in life? Where does it look like god but isn't? And is god trustworthy?
- In regard to this matter of trust, I want to speak to these words of Jesus, because they are easily mis-interpreted in a way that is hurtful and engenders mistrust.
- "be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the anxieties of life, and that day will close 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...."
- What is Jesus not saying?
- Jesus is not saying "do not have a few too many after the Steelers win—or lose."
- Jesus is not saying, "do not have a good time, however that works for you."
- We have to take into careful account. Listen to the words, ""be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life."
- If we are compassionate people and not judgmental people, we know that the anxieties of life can weigh us down. They can become a burden. They cause us to suffer. The weight of our world on our heart and soul can threaten to break us and so those of us who work with trauma know that we will do anything to not experience falling apart spiritually, psychologically, emotionally.
- All of our addictive processes—gambling, overeating, opioids, alcohol, pornography, and so on are all soulful attempts to keep ourselves together and are attempts to manage the pain, the trauma, the anxieties of life.
- What is so challenging in all this is that the wounding of trauma so often happens suddenly, unexpectedly, quickly, but healing is incremental. We are wounded in a flash and we are healed by degrees.
- And we can only heal when we experience our suffering in its fullest. We want to run from it, deny it, minimize it, push it away.
- But the god/man on the cross, crying out, "my god, my god, why have you abandoned me?" Shows us the way to transformative suffering by his own drinking of the dregs of the cup.
- Which brings us to the moment before us.
- It will be my joy to baptize Luna Rose. One of my secret worries is if you hadn't called me as your pastor i would not get to baptize lovely Luna Rose.
- **Baptism is the sacrament of trust for the journey of life.** We cannot in any way guarantee that through baptism Luna Rose will not suffer. In fact, we baptize her into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Which means that we are acknowledging that she enters the waters of life where she will have to swim, go under, cough up water, and be overwhelmed by the waves.
- This is the way for all of us. But **sacraments reveal the hidden nature of reality.**
- The sacrament of baptism makes visible what already exists.
- A God who is in her corner. A God who has placed love for her in the hearts of her family. A God who has placed her within a community of faith. A god who says,

“wonderful and terrible experiences will befall you. But I am with you. You can trust me. You can trust yourself. You can find people who are trustworthy all around you.”

- A God who says, “you can’t truly live if you only put a toe in the water. Sure, it’s cold and it’s deep, but what life there is under the surface!”
- “Luna Rose, hold your nose and jump in! Cannonball! Live life to your fullest.”
- “I will always love you.”
- “You can trust me.”

- **THE SECRET O’ LIFE BY JAMES TAYLOR**