

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • DECEMBER 2, 2018
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Advent Prayer

O God of hope and our deepest longing: you sent your Son to reign in our hearts as the Prince of Peace. By your ever-present Spirit, bring forth a new birth in us that we might offer you the best of our hearts. Awaken us to your abundant love, a star that draws us to endless light. Amen.

The Scripture
Luke 21:25-36

The Coming of the Son of Man

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. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

The Lesson of the Fig Tree

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Exhortation to Watch

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, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 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 Message *In a Pickle* Terry Overfelt

In a pickle! What does it mean?



I like this picture, it looks just like our good, old, dog Clancey. And like the phrase has come to suggest, he does not look too happy to be in a pickle. But sometimes pickles are lucky.

We have a little pickle ornament that we gave to Hillary when she was young. You see as a baby she had the charming, subtle breath of dill. I called her my Pickle Princess. So we found this ornament, and actually, Sally Fancher made us one too. When you hang it in your Christmas Tree, the one who spies it first wins. It's one of those winnings that means nothing other than an attitude of victory. Pickle status, elevated.

Pickling has a purpose; it always preserves and enhances whatever it is applied to.

As we open the Advent season with lots of greening and gait, today I want us to consider the chaos that comes with being in a pickle. Add vinegar, and sugar into a bowl of salt soaked cucumbers and you get preserved and flavor enhanced pickles. The vinegar is bitter, the sugar is sweet. The pickles, well delicious.

Today in the Scripture, the lectionary leads us into Advent with Luke's Gospel that is both bitter and sweet, and in the end we are left preserved and enhanced in a pickling called "Hope."

The Vinegar Chaos

Luke is telling us of Jesus and his words of chaos and destruction. Talk about being in a Pickle. This is an apocalyptic Pickle.

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, stars and on the earth distress. The sea is roaring people are fainting from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. The powers of the heavens will be shaken.

There is chaos all around us all the time. It was here in Jesus' speaking, as he echoed the prophet of old, and as he prophesied 37-years ahead to when the temple where they stood would be demolished.

Humanity has always and will ever know chaos that is natural, religious, social, economic, political, personal...chaos.

And certainly, we have all been alerted to someone's speculation of the day and hour when the end of the world is coming. Just remember watching your computer at midnight at the turn of the year 2000. Oh, it was going to happen, but it didn't.

This Scripture could be speaking of today's headlines.

Headline: Paradise on Fire. California fires in Paradise that got contained on Wednesday night were followed by heavy rain, mudslides, and flooding. I know those people are feeling the kind of end of world, apocalyptic fear that the gospel illustrates with 88 dead, God's heart is breaking.

Headline: Feed the Five Thousand. Five thousand migrant, asylum seekers have reached our border in their month long walk from Central America. They are exhausted, tired, hungry, despairing and sick. Borders are overcome and there is paralyzing delay in the "metering" procedural capacities to legally process them into U.S. soil from where they wait in Mexico. They are in migrant shelters whose capacity has stretched to the breaking point, sometimes huddling on bridges and sleeping in the street, cold and vulnerable to the violence they hoped to escape in their home countries (*Vox* by Dara Lind).

We have met their insistence with panicked strivings for control with tear gas. We saw them coming!

Were we afraid that making provisions to receive these migrants would have been perceived as welcome? Many are sick with respiratory and stomach infections; four have chicken pox; and nearly three dozen women are pregnant. (Woe those who are pregnant in the end times - Luke 21: 32).

We know they are desperate. Dare we imagine that they are looking up, hoping to see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory? We hear God's heartbreak for these beloved.

Headline: Wars and Rumors of War There is distress among nations: Jerusalem, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Myanmar, India, Africa.

The earth quakes in Alaska...

No doubt, we are in the bitter vinegar of chaos where, the Scripture says, we have an opportunity to see the Son of Man standing in the headlines.

The Gospel, paints this scenario as Luke, the writer, continues with the words of Jesus, "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Redemption? You mean improvement, recovery, restoration? Jesus calls his listening audience to stand up and raise our heads.

There by the grace of God...go we! What is our redemptive response? Can we even bear to watch let alone join God in heartbreak?

This "Stand Up and Raise Your Head," is not the answer to their real world trauma and brokenness. These things make us want to duck and cover.

So what is this? Cliché?

No, it is the calling of our first Advent message, HOPE. Stand up. Raise your heads. See what it is and with whom you are feeling and respond, especially in the mystery of our prayers, as we will see.

Maureen Dickman, retired Disciples pastor from Rock Bridge Christian Church read of a woman from New Jersey who rented a U-Haul in hopes of filling it with aid by the time she got to fire victims in Paradise, California. Maureen met this woman in Missouri, and loaded water mid way between the coasts.

"With joy you will draw water from the springs of deliverance...make known God's deeds among the nations" (Isaiah 12:3).

Redemption is drawing near. Stand and raise your head.

Advent calls us to respond and see the kingdom opportunities in our midst. Advent is a time that calls for three comings of God, As a baby, as the Holy presence in us and yes, the chaotic, apocalyptic moment when we will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The Sugar Fig

Moving next into today's word: Jesus says, "LOOK! The fig tree and all the trees, as soon as they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near."

Like nature's rhythm, things are always taking place to remind us that the kingdom of God is near.

"This generation will not pass away until all have taken place."

Now, this one gets me wondering about all the generations since the writing of this word and how they have indeed passed away. Did each? Do each one of us have our personal apocalyptic moment where Jesus comes to us? Our faith says so. Is the cloud he rides in on our fading consciousness upon our dying as he comes for us?

Heaven and earth as we have known them pass away from us but into our lives and resurrection we, like the fig tree are alive with the signs of near summer.

God's word, not the stones of the temple or the stars of the heavens are what we are taking along with us as we do not pass away. God's word remains the same. So here the fig tree's fruit is HOPE! It is assurance all around us of kingdom presence and possibility now and eternally.

Someone said, "If I knew that today was my last day on the earth, I would still spend it plowing and planting."

Look! The promise of a future fruit, a sweet fig is here, always has been and always will be coming, it is Jesus, the Word of god. Did you know you can pickle a fig in the sweet brine of hope?

Prayer is the Process

Lastly, Jesus calls us to be alert! Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life ...ah here we are, our personal chaos, our numbing, distracting response for coping or not coping, is named.

How discouraging to hear this week that the life expectancy of humanity has dropped for the first time in 50 years. Good news: Cancer survival is at its highest. The deaths most attributing to this decline in life expectancy are in younger age groups, particularly the middle aged; suicide and drug overdose.

These two causes of death are not of a hopeful people. These are people who weren't standing in both bitter and sweet to create the agency of hope.

They took their own lives or fell to the seduction of substance that whispered the lie that it could make the chaos bearable. No, these were ones who fell to an alternate

reality until it gripped them and caught them unexpectedly, like a trap.

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.” Here comes the last evocation, prayer. Praying is the agent in keeping the conversation open, the awareness of Emmanuel, God with us who is standing right in front of you! Stay in the bittersweet conversation.

Conclusion

I have a dear friend who is uprooting to move to her son and his family. He has a dreadful disease that has left him permanently debilitated, and as he survives, his family of six will need Grandma and Grandpa to help them. It doesn't make sense anymore for my friend to spend months at a time with them only to come home to put her own house in order and leave again. So off she goes, giving me her Nani's nursery of Missouri toys. And of this chaos she said, "We are not optimistic, but we are hopeful."

She is standing, lifting her head, looking, and staying prayerfully alert in the chaos. This is taking the bitter chaos and the sweet fig and pickling it in a brine called "hope."

Being *in a pickle*," well, not a sad thing after all.

Amen? Amen!

Benediction: As we go in peace, may hope keep us awake and watchful So when we open a jar and hear that little burp, think hope that uses both the bitter and the sweet and waits for the serving up of our Prince of Peace who will come again for each of us, on a cloud with a breath that may have the faint scent of dill.