

Sermon - 1st Sunday in Advent- December 2nd 2018

Text- Luke 21: 25-36

Getting Ready or Not!

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a new church season for us. Advent. The word comes from the Latin – the coming. In our liturgical tradition we have four Sundays before Christmas where we get ready for the birth of Jesus Christ in our midst. At church, we have our Advent Wreath with readings and hymns. Some of our Sundays during this period are full of carols and lessons that help us prepare. Neat time in our church year.

In our homes, we are also preparing. There are a host of Advent traditions that we engage in, although we call them Christmas traditions. Some of us have Advent calendars in our homes, either purchased or hand made. We open up a box for each day in December and follow the “secret instructions.” Many of us begin baking Christmas cookies and treats. Yours truly will be making “holy Land” cookies - Krumkake. A Norwegian cookie shaped like an ice cream cone, taught to me by my mother, and loved by the entire family.

To a lesser degree, Christmas cards will be mailed. Cathy and I still do this tradition. We like to remind people that they are loved, appreciated and are in our thoughts. Lately, I receive many cards via Facebook. Maybe it's the cost of stamps or that we are way too busy.

A good number of us will decorate our homes. Some, lights on the outside, increasingly very high tech. Luckily, Cathy and I accomplished this task about a month ago when we had the one day of mild temperatures. Our Christmas tree will be decorated. We still travel to Shawano and cut one down - others will assemble from a box. And, we will shop for Christmas gifts, especially for those who avoided Black Friday or who refuse to use Amazon Prime.

All of these traditions and activities produce a feeling of comfort, nostalgia and well being. Nice feelings!

Then, we come to church on this, the 1st Sunday in Advent, and we are greeted by a Gospel lesson that speaks of anguish and perplexity in the heavens - that people

will faint from terror. Wow! What a way to put a damper on our nice feelings. The lesson conjures up the image of the Son of Man returning.

What's it all about Alfie? First, many people see this as a sign of The Rapture. The Left Behind Series or The Late Great Planet Earth. To be clear, there is no Biblical basis for the rapture. As a matter of fact, because of our Baptism, we have no reason to fear anything that might happen in the future, for we are God's children forever. Fear, however, is what sells these books, and, frankly, what sells a lot these days. Just remember what the angels said, "don't be afraid."

But Jesus did promise to return one day. We just don't know when! And, he said, until that day be ready. When Christ returns, we should not be caught napping, we should be at work, doing the stuff that Jesus told us to do. We are told to "stay awake", "be prepared", and "to watch." Kind of like when we taught our son or daughter how to drive. You remember that don't you?

We used phrases like:

Keep your hands on the steering wheel!

Keep your eyes on the road ahead of you!

Use your mirrors, left mirror, right mirror, rear-view mirror!

Watch your speed.

That's Advent! You see, Advent is about God's coming among us anew. Jesus advises us to be alert. Watch for the new stuff, the new signs, keep awake to see Jesus working in the world. To be surprised!

Advent is good news. It is a very good thing how God shook up the world over 2000 years ago on that first Christmas with the stunning arrival of the baby Jesus. We need to learn from it and grow from it. So much of the significant stuff happened when the world was asleep. In the middle of the night, the angels sang, waking up those poor shepherds, giving starlight GPS directions to the magi, and bothering Joseph's conscience when he considered dumping his fiancée Mary, who had been called to a strange and wonderful task. None of those people went to bed anticipating a surprise. But God sent them one anyway. And what a surprise! God had to wake them up and shake them up to bring them good news. God intends to do so again. So, anticipate Angels barging into your lives in the next few weeks.

And as we wait and watch, let us strive to live in line with this dream, to live as Christ. Let us wait actively, not passively, engaged in our communities. Buying hams for the poor - forgiving each other - loving the unlovable. Let us be alert to the people and places where God is longing to spend Christmas this year.

Amen Come Lord Jesus - we are getting ready for the Good News.

Emmanuel - God With Us.

Amen. Let it be so.