

Pastor Jon's Sermon from the 1st Sunday in Advent 2024. "A Fig Tree Faith" based on Luke 2:25-36

Our lessons on this first Sunday in Advent speak of an arrival... an arrival of a special guest and the arrival of a new era. And even though our lessons speak of the end times, Jesus says that this too can be a hopeful time of waiting.

So today, we will learn the lesson of the fig tree, learn how to be fully prepared for Jesus' second coming, and learn where to focus our time and energy as we wait for the kingdom of God to be fulfilled on earth.

First, the fig tree. Jesus wants us to have "a fig tree faith" as we prepare for his second coming. And keep in mind, the church has been waiting for this for about 2000 years. In church speak, this is called the delay of the Parousia... the delay of the second coming. It is likely that our own death may come first, but it is still important to be prepared to meet Jesus.

What does it mean to have a fig tree faith? Many of us don't have fig trees planted in our backyards. The only figs I grew up with were Fig Newtons and that line in We wish you a Merry Christmas "Now bring us some figgy pudding." What is figgy pudding anyway?

And yet, in order to navigate the disturbing signs of the end times, Jesus tells us to look at the fig tree. "As soon as the fig tree, and all the trees for that matter, sprout leaves, you know that summer is near." This is a hopeful image... especially when all the tree limbs are bare now. "The parable's simplicity suggests that one does not need secret biblical knowledge or complicated calculations to discern the arrival of the end." You will know, says Jesus, without a doubt, when I return. So don't waste your time reading the signs to time the market on my return.

And what about the signs in the sun, moon, and stars? Jesus says, these will happen and there will be distress on earth. The oceans and the waves will act differently. There will be earthquakes and wars. Many will be confused, afraid, and some will even faint at these signs. These do give us fear and make us wonder. But with a fig tree faith,

Christians will be able to see the signs and be able to stand up and raise your heads... for your redemption is drawing near.

The hoped for kingdom is breaking in as we speak and will be fulfilled when Jesus returns. I love that, your redemption is near. It is here and now. It looks like love, kindness, justice, and healing. Jesus being near reminds me of the cross. The cross says Jesus is always near... in the messiness of our daily lives and the darkness of our world... he is near bringing healing and hope to weary souls.

And, yes, there will be a judgement day. But that's where our faith and baptism come in. When we are baptized and believe in Jesus, we can live confidently knowing that Jesus already has prepared a place for us and come again and take us to himself. In the meantime, we have Jesus' Word. Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus' words will never pass away.

Now here is the hard part... the fire and brimstone. Be ready! Be alert. Be prepared. Jesus says, "Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape the things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." You don't want to be caught unprepared. To be unprepared is place your trust in things other than God and to not take care of unfinished business now. To say I believe, to forgive, to love one another, to be kind.

Advent is a time for spiritual house cleaning. To take a hard look at yourselves and to make some needed changes in your hearts and minds... to repent from things that take you away from loving God and loving your neighbors. What do you need to get rid of or throw away that causes pain for yourselves and others? Now is the time to put it at the foot of the cross. To leave it at the altar as you come for communion.

Finally, being alert and ready for his Advent means, "not letting your heart be weighed down by dissipation and drunkenness, and the worries of this life." Dissipation literally means in the Greek to have drunken nausea (ie a hangover). You can't be alert and ready when you are in that state. And when our hearts are weighed down by the worries of this life, there is less room for God and more time spent on the cares of this world. When we are so consumed with ourselves, we

aren't able to turn our gaze outward... to bring joy and kindness to those traveling with us on earth. The apostle Paul tells us in our second lesson to spend our time loving others as we wait, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

There it is, as we enter the season of Advent, let us have fig tree faith... not worrying about the when of Jesus return but how to live now, to do some spiritual house cleaning... like repenting and throwing away that weigh us down and hurt others... and to love all... Blessed Advent to you All! Amen