

Stay Alert to the Times!

King of Glory Lutheran  
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First Weekend of Advent: Year C: Luke 21

Jeremiah 33:14-16

<sup>14</sup>The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>15</sup>In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup>In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Luke 21:25-36

[Jesus said:] <sup>25</sup>"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. <sup>26</sup>People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup>Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

<sup>29</sup>Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup>as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup>So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup>Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>34</sup>"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, <sup>35</sup>like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>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."

*In these present days of confusion and chaos, we choose to stay alert to God. The times go back and forth, but God's Kairos moments will be clear. Watch, wait for the coming of Christ.*

God's grace and presence be with us this day, amen.

Have you ever noticed that peculiar aspect about time? It seems like there is never enough or there is too much. The children want more time to play before bed, but

if they are bored, the next meal cannot come quickly enough. When there is an engagement or pregnancy, we get so excited about the future and then have to wait and wait and wait. When sitting at a death bed, time seems to drag on and on and on. In these seasons or moments, it may be challenging to stay alert, to stay in the present, because we're so excited or fearful of what is to come.

I was reminded this last week, that even the trees have a sense of time. There was a report from an arborist about our trees on the local news. He was talking about the current drought this fall. We haven't had a snow fall yet, there has been no rain. If it continues much longer, the trees will begin to get confused. Their roots will go down looking for the wetness that typically is there. While the grass naturally goes dormant and doesn't need moisture, the shrubs and trees do. If they don't get that moisture, they might think it is spring and begin to bud. His point was we need to water our trees and shrubs once a month. Trees know about timelines of dormancy and budding. They will do what they've always done in the past but get confused if there is no water.

Here is where we, the church, are as far as timelines. It's the first weekend of Advent, the beginning of a new church year. Luke is our primary Gospel for this year. You might have noticed we begin near the end of the book, Chapter 21. Christmas Eve will find us reading Luke 2, the story of Jesus' birth. It might feel strange to go from back to front during these Advent weeks, yet time goes back and forth even in our text from today.

Listen to Jesus speak about the future time.

‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars...’

‘People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming’

‘They will see ‘the Son of Man coming’

Then Jesus comes back to the present moment.

‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees’

‘You know that the kingdom of God is near.’

Jesus returns to the future:

‘This generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away.’

Furthermore, Jesus is saying all of this right before His own arrest and death, when His time on earth will end. Yet He speaks of His return. He is looking forward and backwards making promises to those in the present.

We might agree that time has felt a bit like whip lash these last 20 months. The pandemic has felt like it was never going to end. Then during the summer, it got better, and we hoped for the days of old. The infections came roaring back and now there are yet new variations. All this makes us wonder, how long, oh, how long.

The pull-out of Afghanistan is yet another example of time: past, present, future. As American troops pulled out in real time, reflections were made upon the past. Why were we there, what did we accomplish? Likewise, how would the past influence the future? Would there be a return to the past, or consistency in the future? We humans live in chronological time with the impact of past influencing present and future.

For Luke's audience, also very human, it would be one or two generations beyond Jesus' death and resurrection that they were hearing these words. The temple, their center of worship, would have already been destroyed and yet they, like we, are receiving the promises of Jesus for a new day. The past, present and future are intertwined; Jesus speaking of what has come and what will be.

God's people have always been guided by the promises of God. In our first lesson from Jeremiah (around the 6<sup>th</sup> century before Christ) the Lord speaks about the future. "The days are surely coming (future tense), when I will fulfill the promise, I made (past tense)," says the Lord. God would bring back the exiled people, rebuild the temple and restore the Kingdom of David. For God the future and the past are woven together for God's purposes and for God's promises.

The Lord was encouraging the ancient people to be on the watch for that future time when God would restore all that had been lost. Which means, does it not, that we must stay alert to the times as well? We, in this day and age, watch for God's promises to be fulfilled.

It is this now and not yet time, we live in. We believe Jesus has risen from the dead in the past. He is present with us right now in God's Word and the bread and wine, and He promised He will come again in the future for our redemption. Not only that, but He will also come to judge, redeem, and restore all of creation. While we humans, live in chronological time, God works in Kairos time.

Kairos time is the right time. It is the opportune moment for God to act. When Jesus returns, it will be a Kairos moment. None of us know when, none of us

know where. It is in the mystery of God's character to decide that appropriate instance when the Reign of Christ will come again.

To that end, Jesus' tells all the people to 'be alert' to the times. We live in the now and the not yet. If we allow ourselves to run too far out into the future, we miss the present moment. If we live in the past, that also stops us from being in the here and now. It's common for all of us to worry about one thing or another, out there in the future. Yet, when we do that, we might miss what God is doing for us right now!

The longer I walk a faith journey, I'm more and more convinced at what great theological minds have long understood. Train yourself, as much as possible to stay grounded in the present moment. This is where God is at work, now. Watch for God. Listen for God. The past is already gone, and God holds the future.

Jesus said it this way. "When you see all the signs in the sun, moon, and stars, when there is distress among nations, rise up and get ready! Your redemption, your salvation is at hand!" God's grace, God's deliverance will be coming, so get ready!

Won't that be an amazing time? We can hardly imagine what it will be like, when Jesus comes back to rule, judge and redeem all. It will be a season of hope for certain.

He says to us, "When you see all the leaves on the fig tree, God's kingdom is near." Brothers and sisters in Christ, this message of hope encourages us to be alert. Watch. Wait. There is new life coming. The leaves on the trees show us that. What God has in store at the end time is more than we can imagine. Yet if we are stuck in our ways and stuck in our minds, we won't be open to seeing God's Kairos time.

In these chaotic days of politics, migrants on the move, climate conversations, and racial injustice this Advent season gives us ample reason to wait and watch for Jesus' birth. His incarnation will once again return our focus to the love which brought Him to our world.

As you and I begin Advent, let's make a renewed effort to stay in the present. Stay alert, to watch and wait for what God is doing today. Amen!