

A Thrill of HOPE

Sermon Outlines

First Sunday of Advent

DECEMBER 2, 2018

The Anticipation of HOPE

Sunday Scripture Reading: *Luke 21:25–36*

Introduction

I have heard it said that February is the longest month, despite having the fewest days. By the end of February, winter has lost its charm. The holidays have come and gone. The hills have been sled-ded. The plants have been barren for months. The snow has become dingy and dirty. The skies are still gray, and it feels like the world might never be warm or green again.

Then the first signs of spring break forth. A robin lands in your yard, or a crocus breaks through the snow-covered ground. A tree starts to bud, or the sun comes out after days of cloudy skies. Suddenly, your perspective changes from bleak to hopeful anticipation. You know that spring is coming and that summer will arrive soon after. Plans shift from shoveling snow and heating bills to thoughts of warm breezes and gardens.

The fig tree is used as such an illustration in this text. Summer is coming when the fig tree begins to sprout leaves. Summer is near, and the barrenness of winter, the concerns that the stores laid up for the winter, will be depleted before the next crop grows and begins to fade. This is good news to a people dependent on growing their own food. This is good news in a place of poverty and in a land of oppression. This is good news at a time when furnaces do not exist and in a place where desert nights get very cold. Summer is coming.

But the text is not about a fig tree or the hopeful anticipation of summer's warm rays; it is about something even greater: the coming of the Lord. There will be signs of the coming of the Lord too. When it feels like your stores are depleted, when it feels like you can't make it anymore, there is good news: the Messiah is coming. And as we sit in this season of Advent, we are reminded again that the trees are beginning to bud and that the Messiah is indeed coming.

1. The signs of the times herald justice and redemption.

- a. *The signs of the times are often discussed with fear. This text also alludes a bit to that. Jesus is pointing to common language from the Old Testament about the day of the Lord.*
 - i. The scriptures Joel 2:1–2, Amos 5:18–20, Zechariah 1:14–15 all reference impending doom, natural disasters, and war—all as signs of the coming of the day of the Lord.
 - ii. The day of the Lord is alluded to as being a day when the enemies of God will be punished, a day of judgment for those who stand in opposition to the ways of God.
- b. *However, the day of the Lord is also referenced with the language of mercy and blessing toward the people of God.*
 - i. Isaiah 4:2–6, Joel 3:9–21, Amos 9:11–15, Zechariah 14:6–9 are just a few of the texts that reference the blessings that will be bestowed upon the children of God when the day of the Lord comes.
 - ii. The day of the Lord, then, is not a day that those who are just and righteous should fear; rather, it is a day that should be embraced.
- c. *Justice is only scary for those who have acted in unjust ways, and the themes of these Old Testament texts seem to be about justice.*
- d. *We often approach these texts—with their language of seeming natural disasters—an attitude of fear, but fear is not meant to be the way of existence for the people of God.*

2. Redemption is about hope, not fear.

- a. *Jesus's words are about redemption, not condemnation.*
 - i. There are myriad stories about people fearing the return of Christ. This idea that the world will be ruled by terror and destruction, while having some connection with texts like these, misses the heart of this text being about redemption. The signs are not those of destruction but of restoration and renewal.
 - ii. Verse 28 focuses on this in particular: “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” This verse is not about cowering, hiding, or dreading the coming of the Messiah. Rather, it is about standing tall and lifting up your head—because this is good news! Redemption is coming!
- b. *Advent and the coming of Christ are about the hope of redemption of the past and for our future.*
 - i. The Jews longed for a Messiah to bring the day of the Lord, both for the justice that would be brought on their oppressors and also for the freedom it would bring to them.
 - ii. The coming of the Messiah in Jesus brought redemption in a way they didn't expect. The day of the Lord didn't come destroying empires in political ways; instead, it sought to build the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven—through love and mercy.
 - iii. When we long for the return of Christ, we often look and hope for the destruction of those who perpetrate injustice, but maybe we should be looking for the ways God wants to bring justice and redemption—in the sense of making things right—to the world.
 - 1. Justice doesn't mean annihilation or revenge.
 - 2. Justice means making things right.

3. We hope not for revenge or destruction but for even the worst things to be made right.

3. It's easy to miss the Messiah in our midst.

- a. *Earlier in Luke 21 the disciples point out the grandeur of the temple while seemingly missing that the presence of God—Jesus—is in their midst. All this talk of the day of the Lord being at hand, and he is present among them!*
- b. *While we wait in hopeful expectation of Christ's return, we cannot overlook the places where Christ is at work already. The kingdom is now; it came with Jesus to earth, but it has yet to be fulfilled. We cannot miss the signs of the nowness of God's presence for the sake of the signs of the future.*
 - i. There is something to the signs Jesus mentions.
 1. The sun and stars doing interesting things has been happening for all of recorded history.
 2. Storms have also been happening for all of recorded history.
 3. Fear and terror for what is to come have also been happening for all of recorded history.
 - ii. These signs can be found both now and in the past. There is a commonness to these signs that seems intentional. We do not know when the Lord's return will be; it could be any second.
 - iii. Redemption is also happening now. It's in our presence. We just have to have the eyes to see.
 - iv. Justice and redemption in their fullness will come too. We just have to look forward with hopeful anticipation.

Conclusion

Summer is coming. It might seem like a long ways off on a dreary December Sunday. It might feel even more far off on a dreary February day, but when you look for glimpses, you see them. There is promise in the calendar and in the ways the trees change in late summer. There is promise in the sound of birds and in warmer breezes. But if we aren't looking, we can miss them already happening in our midst.

Jesus is coming too. We remember his first coming with joy, but we also look again to his second coming hopeful anticipation. A day that will be filled with justice and redemption. And we wait with heads held high, confident in Christ's mercy and grace. We look ahead for the signs of that coming too, in the ways redemption is happening now. We look in hope at how lives are being restored, how lives are being made new, and the work that Christ is doing in our own hearts, and we know that the trees are budding around us and the day of the Lord has come and is still to come in beautiful and life-giving ways. We move forward in hope for all to be made new, even as things are already being made new.