



First Sunday of Advent November 28, 2021

“Raise your heads”

Pastor Kirk Kerns

*“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”
(Luke 21:33)*

Let us pray: Merciful God, you continually show us your ways of forgiveness and steadfast love. Remember not our sins, but recall your compassion to your children, satisfy the longing of your people, and fulfill all our hopes for eternal peace through Jesus Christ, our Savior and lord. Amen.

I read this note this week about Advent beginning, “The season of Advent is a sticky-note reminder to the church: God is doing a new thing. Again.” What is that new thing that God is doing again? Advent is about waiting for the Son of Man to come to us. “Again.” God is always doing something new. For us in Advent we seek out the Christ Child’s arrival each year. Advent brings us the apocalyptic readings about the end of time and what we are to expect. For some

folks Advent is the big downer before Christmas. So many times I have, as well as my colleagues, encouraged our people at church to take in Advent for all its worth before we get to Christmas.

But the problem is the messages of the Advent Season are troubling for many folks who just want to get to Christmas. The beginning of our gospel from St. Luke today doesn't help when Jesus tells those gathered around him, "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 power of the heavens will be shaken." Does that sound like something you really want to hear four weeks before Christmas?

I don't know about you but I do not cherish going shopping this time of the year. I read these words from Jesus in our gospel and if I go shopping I will experience distress among the shoppers and the fear of what is coming when one arrives at the stores to shop. Maybe this could be called the beginning of the birth pangs we read about from scripture.

Shopping is a mild distress in the big picture of life as it is today. Well maybe for some shopping is a major distress. I read these words from scripture and wonder about the world today as we know it. There is so much turmoil in

many places coming from many people that maybe one could say it is time for our Lord to come again as we pray "Come Lord Jesus." At the end of the first part of our gospel, Jesus says, "Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise you heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

I found this statement to be maybe what we all need to consider. Keeping our heads raised up high so that we can see the things that God is doing something new. The reality is that when life gets tough we tend to hunch our shoulders downward and lower our heads in hope that we will not see the distress that is present around us. When the heavens are to be shaken and we will see the Son of Man coming is when we are told to stand up and raise our heads. But the natural instinct would be and will be is for us to cower, to run for cover, to keep our heads down, not up. That seem to be what the logical response would be.

It would be only those heroes, the foolhardy, the powerfully courageous, those who love deeply, and yes, people of faith who can, by the gift of grace of God see what others cannot see raise their heads in such times. Indeed, in times like these that we are living in presently. Hate weighs so many down these days. Disagreements on the national level in our government are becoming worrisome for some in congress. It seems that they are running around as Chicken Little did

in the kid's nursery rhyme shouting, "The sky is falling." Week after week we hear and read about what the pandemic is doing and has done and folks jump on what they consider right no matter what and run around with their heads lowered. The reality is that hate creates so much tension and turmoil that it is tiring and exhausting.

The day of the Lord's return will cause so much chaos for those who do not believe and for some who do believe. So many things conspire to keep us from lifting our gaze, but when we do, it is often then that we can see the promised "Son of Man coming." Indeed it is only when we stand up and raise our heads that we recognize the presence of Christ among us in spite of what is going on around us. There were many in Jesus' time that looked down upon his followers. His message was so countercultural that people were mocked, and struck, and imprisoned. It would have been easy for them to just quit and follow the detractors of the faith. But Jesus tells those gathered that they should raise their heads. Why? Because something new was going to take place and that their redemption was drawing near.

There is an old saying that "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade." "What Jesus' advent will do is upend the cosmos once again." I read that this week and if we think about it, when Jesus was born the cosmos was upended. It

seemed like a quiet and gentle time at the birth of our Lord and it was for the most part. But when that baby grew into adulthood the world was rocked by his death on a cross and resurrection. God was and is always doing something new. Lemonade is refreshing.

There has been so much roaring of the seas, fear and foreboding, and the shaking of our very foundations lately. Can we overcome foreboding and have a different outlook this Advent so that when Christmas comes we can find joy. This year especially seems to be a time for a different outlook this Advent. We can take our cues from the texts before us that have little to do with waiting and everything to do with watching. There will be signs. This Advent it seems necessary to welcome its primary message as that which we need to hear.

Karoline Lewis in her commentary gave these points that we need to hear. "That God is here, has been, and always will be. That the powers that appear to be in control are not the powers that control who we are and how we choose to be in the world. That our witness matters to God's activity in the world-but it will come at a price."

"There is extraordinary risk in insisting on a kind of power that will never be coercive or manipulative. That seeks out the lost and liberated the bound. That

regards the lowly and lifts up the overlooked. That believes in salvation for all people.” Such testimony cost Jesus his life.

On this first Advent, we are reminded that there will be signs—signs of God’s presence and power when the locations for and securities of God’s power have been called into question. There are many doubters out there in the world. There are so many people walking around with their heads down worried about what is happening. We are guilty also to some extent as we walk around with our heads lowered. When we walk around with our heads lowered, all we see is the ground.

So for this Advent our challenge is for us to walk around with our heads up and our shoulder back and see the new things that God is doing every day. Look above the crowd and over the crowd and see what God is doing around us. There is much good going on and it would be a shame to miss it.

Our second reading from Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians gives us much hope. First, are reminded of the joy of knowing that we are loved when life is tough. The Thessalonians were under great pressure to bow down to the Roman way of life but they persevered through their troubles to follow Christ. This gave Paul great joy knowing the pressure they were under to walk away from their faith. Second, the Thessalonians found the key to Christian discipleship is through

love. To have love for one another comes right from Jesus who made it clear in Luke 10 that the only thing that mattered is to love God, and to love one's neighbor as you loved yourself. Third, there is the prayer that the Thessalonians may be strengthened in holiness. Paul writes, "And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

Advent seems to be a strange time for many folks especially if they are not part of the body of Christ. But for us it is a time of preparation for the coming of our Lord. If we have our heads lowered and we are not involved in our surroundings we will only see the ground. So on this first Sunday of Advent lift up your heads O people and see the wonders and the glory of our Lord around us. We will see many things that will lift up our spirits. So Jesus says to us to keep alert, keep alert for the coming of the kingdom that springs forth many wonders but if we are not raising our heads we may miss it.

If nothing else this Advent, stand up and witness all that God is doing all around you and do not be brought down by the earthly powers that will look down on you. One thing that people may not know is as Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Thanks be to God, amen.

Let us pray: Lord, help us to always raise our heads knowing that our redemption is always near. Help us to love as you love and to be a witness to your amazing grace and work that is all around us. Help us to trust in you in all that we do and see and hear from your Holy Word. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.