

Advent 1
Luke 21: 25-36
November 29/09
Rev. Robin Sherman

Luke 21: 25-36

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

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

34 '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, ³⁵like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Be 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.'

Can you think of a time when you were getting ready for a big adventure? A trip you were taking or some kind of excursion you were going on? What did you have to do before you could go?

Did you make lists of what you needed; book tickets and hotel rooms; find someone to take care of the pets or maybe the kids. Did you sort through clothes to see what to bring; making sure they were laundered and fresh? Measure up suitcases and figure out how to pack the car? Check on your medications to be sure you had all you needed?

These are some of the things you do before going on a trip or adventure. But most often adventures happen spur of the moment and catch us off guard. We say we are having

an adventure when something dangerous or unexpected happens to us. In fact the word adventure is defined in the dictionary as a happening; the encountering of danger; a daring, hazardous undertaking; an unusual, stirring experience, often of a romantic nature. An adventurer is someone who has a liking for danger, excitement, etc.

Sometimes when we start off in the car Diane and I will say we are off on an adventure and that usually means we have no particular destination or design for the day. We also refer to this as “running away” or “plan C”. We are off on an adventure open to whatever the day brings us. In the past our adventures have taken us down roads we had not been down before only to end up in a farmer’s field; it has brought us up close to nature we had not noticed before. It has taught us to trust our instincts and to watch for certain signs to find our way back or to lead us to a new place.

Today we begin an adventure toward Christmas. In fact, today is the first Sunday in our Advent – ure. Had you figured that out already by my lead into this topic; the word adventure begins with the word advent. The word advent means a coming or arrival. Advent in the church is awaiting the arrival of Jesus’ birth. It is preparing for the coming of the baby Jesus. Through these next weeks and four Sundays we will prepare ourselves for Jesus coming again. This advent-ure has us focusing on four key areas that will help us along the way so we will be prepared for this unusual, stirring event.

Today is the Sunday of hope; we lit this candle of hope to remind ourselves of the hope that comes, not just with the birth of Jesus; but right at the beginning of our advent-ure. We start our adventure with the hope that this flame goes with us into the world that can sometimes give us reason to feel like there is no hope and if that is how you’re feeling today than this Sunday has come just in time.

My father used to say to us as kids, and still says it today, “live in hope or die in despair”. It was only recently that I realized that this line was from a Charles Dickens book. This one line written many years ago and buried deep in a novel has a depth all on its own. This statement applied to us in everyday life is the stuff refrigerator magnets and bumper stickers are made of. Live in hope or die in despair.

But isn’t it true. If we do not have hope, what is left? If we cannot see that somewhere down the road things will be better than for a lot of people despair is the only alternative. Just this week, I have received calls from two people whose hope is fading. They both are having troubles they never thought they would have. Job losses, disability, red tape, depression, lack of community have lead them to this place of emptiness; of not knowing where to turn. These are not isolated stories. They are the stories of many people all around us. They have lost hope; their spirits are dying in their despair. The help we were able to give because of your generosity to the Helping Hand fund is their hope that things can be better. That same hope that came thousands of years ago with a baby.

We are being asked by our Gospel reading to stay alert, keep awake and look for the signs of the coming Christ, the signs of hope.

Friday was Black Friday in United States, a name that I find to be a bit unsettling not because of the millions of dollars that will be spent but because it sends my mind into thoughts of negative things. However, there is no doubt a number of Canadians, particularly with the dollar so close to par, participated in a ritual of shopping that is said to be the biggest one day event of the year. Many stores would make or break their livelihood on this one day. Stores like Toys Are Us, Target, and WalMart were opening their doors at midnight Thursday night or 4 or 5 Friday morning. They would find people lined up outside all night waiting for the doors to open. Some might say they are living in hope of finding the best price but I suggest to you that they are really dying in despair.

A despair that they don't even realize. In my mind they have lost sight of the adventure. They have lost sight of the season that is upon us; the reason for the season, if you will. They are desperate in their attempts to fill the void with stuff they think they must have. They have confused their priorities when it comes to Christmas. Very few people, if any, would wait in line for hours on end to come to church for Christmas. And yet, if you did a pole of the people standing in the line-ups they would want the church to be there for them when they needed it; when they realise they are dying in despair; when they feel their hope is gone.

The advent candle of hope shines a light into a community of despair. It shines here this morning to give us the inspiration we need to move it out into the community. This candle is a beacon of hope shining in the midst of despair, not just to come to the rescue when the financial obligations become too much or money for food has run out; but also in the times of plenty, when we stand in line awaiting the next fix of the latest video game or latest toy craze. This candle blazes in the midst of every kind of despair; it feeds the hungry, wraps its arms around the grieving, lifts up the sick, and celebrates with joy the milestones of life – anniversaries, birthdays –

Friday night we saw the movie "The Blind Side" the story of Michael Oher, a black, 6'5" 300 lb. Teenager, taken in on a cold rainy night by a wealthy white family. Michael was pushed on in school, separated from his mother and siblings at the age of 7 because of his mother's drug habit, thought to be un-teachable by some teachers. He had one thing that kept him going – hope. His mother had taught him even in her drug addicted state, to close his eyes when things were bad until the bad things were over and that when he opened his eyes it would all be fine. She gave him hope that the world could be a good place, that people could be good even in the midst of her despair. Hope that one day it would be better. The family that took him in continued to give that hope. This family accepted him unconditionally, they pushed him to succeed by giving him hope, they gave him the tools he needed to succeed and they challenged the people around them to face their bigotry.

This is the hope that Jesus brings to us. The world can be a good place but first we have to open our eyes to the goodness and create the goodness. Be awake, be on guard, be alert at all times, it is so easy to fall into complacency, it is so easy to be lulled into simply watching the Christmas pageant or hearing the Christmas story with a blah,

blah, blah attitude rather than hearing and accepting its challenge to faithful living. It's call to being a beacon of hope to those living in despair. This baby came to shake us up; to challenge us in all areas of complacency, bigotry, fearfulness; to give us hope for a new world of peace and love. A world that will be revealed to us as we create it; a world God has asked us to create.

This afternoon, we will participate in the Christmas parade. Our pirate ship will be a beacon of hope. Our community will see us alive and well, living in hope, ready to take on the challenge of Jesus coming again, not as an ending but as a beginning. Hope for a world dying in despair. Hope that a child can change the world. Our advent-ure begins right now!

Amen