

Advent 1
Year C 2021 Luke 21:25-36
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*Luke wrote with a deep and growing sense that Christian discipleship is a kind of living in between— aware of Jesus, waiting for Jesus, and coming to know this Jesus for whom we wait in the midst of an eventful, unpredictable, even tumultuous world, waiting to stand before him, yet not always knowing where he is.

Advent is a season that messes with our sense of time.¹ While we typically live with a fairly linear view of time — one event coming after another — the church's liturgical and lectionary calendar is cyclical — patterns of events repeating themselves. For this reason, the church year that begins in Advent puts in front of us passages about the end of history before moving in later weeks to prepare us for the coming of the Christ child and the dawn of a new age.

Luke's community is wrestling with the question of time or, more accurately, timing. In particular, the question at hand is when the promised return of Jesus and consummation of history will occur. Whereas Mark seems to tie these events to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Luke — writing nearly two decades later — distances the promised end of history and the Temple's destruction. Luke is, in fact, down right vague about when Jesus will return, refusing to offer any hint of a timetable. The emphasis therefore shifts from when these things will happen (21:7), to the proper disposition of the discipleship community (21:34ff.).

Both 1) the distance Luke puts between the events of his day and the end of time, and 2) the emotional tenor of watchful confidence he calls for create space for the mission of the church. In early verses in this chapter (21:12-19), in fact, Luke seems to anticipate the later story of Acts that he will write as the events Jesus describes foreshadow many of the major episodes in the life of the early church as Luke depicts it. For this reason, whatever rumors Luke's community may have heard about the coming end,

¹ David Losey Commentary Luke 21: 25-36 2009

and no matter what rumors may yet come, the Christian community is to remain steadfast in its ministry, trusting that Jesus will provide the necessary words and inspiration so that the discipleship community may witness to the gospel through word, deed, and prayer in any and all situations.

Apocalyptic texts come across to most of our hearers as alien, strange, even off-putting. Truth be told, whatever present worries we may harbor about our global pandemic or environmental holocaust, most of us express little day-to-day concern about the imminent end of the world and even less about Jesus' second coming. In this respect, we may feel that we live at a great distance from Luke's audience.

Yet at the same time, we are as intimately acquainted as they were with the challenges presented by waiting for an event that seems late in coming. We may be waiting for an event on a national or global scale like pandemic recovery, a post-war economic recovery after Afghanistan, or concerted international action to reduce climate change. Or we may be waiting an event on a personal level like the results from a biopsy, a letter from an estranged child, or the access to care for a loved one with dementia or Alzheimer's disease or the frustrations in the limitations of our aging bodies. Whatever the case, we know the challenge of waiting, the stress of waiting, the anxiety of waiting.

In this context, Luke offers us a perspective that, while it will not remove our waiting, it may affect its character. We live, according to Luke, between the two great poles of God's intervention in the world: the coming of Christ in the flesh and his triumph over death – in this regard we should not forget that these verses serve as the hinge between Jesus' teaching and his passion — and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time and his triumph over all the powers of earth and heaven. This “in-between time,” though fraught with tension, is nevertheless also characterized by hope as both the beginning and the ending of the story of the Church — and of our story — which has been secured by Christ. We are therefore free to struggle, to wait, to work, to witness — indeed to live and die — with hope because we know the end.

The reality is this: anything can happen at any moment—and in one way or another everything is happening in every moment. There is no present moment to which one can cling, and change is not limited by predictability

and control. Here is an opportunity gently to challenge the kind of religion that turns faith into a sort of fee-for-service arrangement with the Divine. Yet, even as we do participate in our happiness, and even as there are indefinable connections between how we live and what we live, these connections are never exact. There are other realities at work that sometimes overwhelm—realities of brokenness and evil, of serendipity and grace—and so the present moment is itself an event for us, worth loving and worth living, because it is a gift. One can only accept it with thanksgiving, trust the promise that lies behind it, and pray for the strength to do what is necessary to fill it with faithfulness—waiting for God.²

I see faith and hopefulness in our church as we prepare our hearts in Advent. I see the anticipation through readiness to reach out to others in love as we strengthen our mission of outreach as modeled by the ministry of Grace Connection. I, as your Deacon in charge, experience the hospitality and grace offered to me through trust in conversation learning of desires in your witness of Christ in community. We generously give to others as need presents itself, material or pastoral, a helping hand, a visit, a meal, a ride. All are portions of God's love at work in here in this place and out into a hurting world. I see the redemptive work of Christ at work through the repairing of relationships through reconciliation, trusting in God to turn our hearts where we may be unable to do so. In this, we are assured of Christ's coming. Our community together celebrates and anticipates moving forward in love.

Now to him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages. World without end. Amen ³

² David L. Bartlett; Barbara Brown Taylor. *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

³ William Temple *Christian Faith and Life* Morehouse Publishing 1994 Text: William Temple 1931 p. 39