

Luke 21:25-36

21:25 "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.

21:26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 21:27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory.

21:28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

21:29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees;

21:30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

21:31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

21:32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

21:33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

21:34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly,

21:35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

21:36 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."

SERMON

All around us, the images of Christmas abound. We turn on the TV... or go to the stores to window shop and see scenes of angels or of Santa ... scenes perhaps of an old-fashioned family Christmas. Or we wander into our own living-room and see a star, or an angel, or a scarlet bird on top of our ornate Christmas tree ...if we've been ambitious enough to begin decorating.

Somehow, these images make us feel better ... they are signs of stability ... reminders perhaps of simpler, saner times when the world and our own life made sense ... or maybe they are even touchstones to a magical, make-believe time ... a time far more idyllic than now.

Move 1: After all, the world we live in is a chaotic place ... a world of constant change and constant demands on us to change.

Indeed, we live and have lived in a time of unprecedented change in history. In our own lifetimes we have witnessed the birth and continuation of space travel. We have seen medical miracles beyond the wildest dreams of those generations who have gone before us ... transplants and artificial organs ... new drugs and therapies ... all which have extended life itself to new limits. And of course, we have been confronted by a new and devastating medical crisis of global proportions ... COVID-19.

But lest we get too 'mono-focused' we have also seen the incredible juggling and redrawing of political boundaries and alliances that have changed the very map of the world we live.

And yet, despite the struggles and challenges each new change brings, it also seems to bring us to a new threshold of progress ... and hope ... to a new age of even longer life ... better health ... and the ever-elusive peace for which our world yearns.

Yes, change is all around us ... moving us as individuals and as a society in directions yet uncharted ... shaping us in the very ways that we think and act. Change is all around us ... and the fact is ... there is no escape from it in this chaotic world.

Move 2: But the old adage still holds true, does it not ... the old adage that says: "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

We live in a time when the world produces more food than ever ... in vast quantities that are actually stockpiled by nations and corporations. And yet, people in our communities are malnourished and millions across the globe are starving to death, even as we gather here this morning.

Hunger continues to stalk the world relentlessly ... not because we lack the ability to get food to the hungry ... but because of our age-old human greed.

We live in an age when we know more about psychology than ever before... about how we inter-relate with one another.

And yet, relationships with meaning and compassion still elude us ... not because we lack insight or knowledge ... but because we lack trust and faithfulness in our relationships with others.

And we live in a time in which communication across the globe is virtually instantaneous ... where people and governments from every corner of the world can communicate with each other with speed and ease.

And yet, despite this immediate web of communication ... war and conflict abound ... not because nations and leaders lack the tools for peace and cooperation ... but because racism, nationalism ... ethnicism and hatred abound.

All of our technology ... all of our wisdom ... all of our sophisticated changes appear to be wonderful and enlightened ... but in the end leave us high and dry.

For these changes and advances cannot deal with the separation and brokenness that we experience in our lives ... in our hearts. Despite the changes in and around us ... our pain ... our anger ... our greed and sinfulness still remain firmly entrenched within us all.

Change happens ... the maelstrom of change swirls us around and about ... but

the heart and soul of life remains unmoved ... unchanged ... trapped forever it seems in the old patterns of self-interest and sin.

Move 3: So what to do in the midst of change all around us ... and the ongoing human malaise within us?

Perhaps it is best to pretend that none of it is our concern ... to retreat into a winter wonderland where everything is cheerful and nice. So we pour another glass of eggnog ... or our spirit of choice ... we immerse ourselves in the commercialism of the season ... shop 'till we drop ... and hope all the bad stuff goes away.

Like soldiers in the trenches, we learn in life that sometimes it best to just keep our heads down. Too many changes ... too many broken relationships ... too many 'same old problems as always' leave us shell-shocked and weary.

And so we take refuge in things that give us a sense of stability ... in work and hobbies ... in possessions and money. We hold on to the status quo of our lives ... onto possessions which we hope will give meaning ... onto behaviour that is destructive to us and to others ... and onto attitudes that set us at odds with our beliefs and our faith ... but at least keep us safely in our old, familiar patterns.

We are like the people of Israel in Isaiah's time ... living in exile ... living in a political wilderness far from home and Temple ... far from God it seemed ... exiles who can rationalize that it is better to live comfortably as slaves in Babylon ... than to make the hard journey back to Jerusalem to rebuild their nation.

We are like the people of Jesus' time ... living under oppression in their own land ... under Roman occupation ... and believing that it is the only way things can be.

We find ourselves living in a wilderness of contradictions and apprehension ... where shifting values make changes in our images of family ... of relationships ... of love ... and we wonder what is right or proper anymore. And instead of

working for understanding, resolution, and change in our society ... we hold onto our chaotic status quo life as if it were paradise itself.

Hunkered down in our trenches we hear the whizzing shells fly over our heads ... and we wait ... for reinforcements or destruction ... immobilized by change.

Move 4: IV. But listen ... hear a far-off sound coming closer ... a not-so-distant trumpet coming our way ... listen and hear the Word of God saying: "Things are going to change ... but in God's good and gracious way! Pull your heads out of the trenches ... raise your heads ... for your God is near!"

We hear from the words of Isaiah that the Messiah is on the way ... we hear of the Advent of God's new realm of hope and promise.

The Word comes to us and proclaims that the wilderness and dry land shall be glad ... that the desert shall rejoice and blossom. We hear of the promise of life in the very midst of that which was dead. We hear from Isaiah the promise of life renewed ... of hope restored ... of joy restored.

The Word says to us: "Help is on the way ... for in God's gracious time ... all will be wholeness and joy.

But that is not all. For in the Gospel lesson the Word tells us that the One who comes as Messiah comes to change everything ... we know that and are to celebrate it.

Jesus says to us and John: "See and hear the change that the Messiah will bring ... the blind receive their sight ... the lame walk ... the dead are raised."

This is the One who comes to overturn all that is ... the One who comes to bring justice ... to mend the brokenness of life ... who comes to redeem all things. The Messiah is the One who comes to exchange the old for new ... bringing us new relationships as individuals ... and between the nations.

And the Messiah gives us signs to behold ... signs that God's good change is already here ... and yet still on the way. Yes ... the Signs are here even in this place ... in a meal around the table of the Lord where all are free to come and

be fed ... in a community of people gathered together ... gathered not to criticize each other or judge one another ... but to praise God for one another ... and in a community of God's children fed and strengthened to serve here and out there in all of life.

Such is Good News for us ... for in our weariness ... God promises to change us too ... from our apathy ... from our indifference ... from our entrenchment in sin and selfishness. God promises to change us ... so that we can let go of all that separates us from God and one another.

Yes ... the Messiah is coming to change us all ... freeing us from all those things that stop us from serving and loving others ... freeing us to be what God has already declared us to be in our Baptisms ... people who are greater than the greatest prophet ... freeing us to be servants, as Christ has been a servant to us.

CONCLUSION

So, as Advent winds its course to Christmas ...

Lift up your heads and see the Messiah's presence among us ... in this community ... in each other ... the Messiah's presence *which does* change us to the core.

Lift up your hands ... to praise God who comes to change us all.

And lift up your hearts to serve not only each other ... but everyone you meet ... to feed the hungry ... and to bring Good News to all people!

AMEN