

LELC 120218 Advent One

The text for Advent 1 is always the passage about the Coming of the Son of Man. In Luke, it is about there being signs in the sun and stars, and the Son of Man coming on the clouds. So when we worked out that I would be preaching today I thought to myself, “Advent One, the end of the world, oh goodie, what do I do with that?!”

So in this passage, and its parallels in the other Gospels, the Gospel writers are borrowing from the rich OT tradition about the coming “day of the Lord”. It is what Jeremiah is talking about in our Jeremiah text. The day when the Lord shall come and execute righteousness and justice. It's a powerful message that one day God is gonna come and do something to set right all the bad stuff going on in the world. Such images usually came at times when things were at their worst – maybe like when children were being tear-gassed or torn from their parents as they were seeking refuge, or like when people were getting shot just for doing their jobs while being black, or like when there were great natural disasters such as huge hurricanes and raging fires being caused by global warming (oh wait, that might not have been happening back then).

You gotta admit though, it was probably a really powerful word of hope in the midst of all of the bad stuff that was happening that the bad stuff was NOT okay with God. And one day, God would show up, (maybe descend on a cloud or something) and set it all right. You can imagine that it was easy to long for such a day; not to mention how easy it could've been to look around and make the mental list of all the ones God should come and smite, sooner rather than later. Maybe it still is easy to hope for such a day.

The prophets, and Amos in particular, make it pretty clear that the day of the Lord was not necessarily a day to hope for. Amos said it would be like escaping from a lion only to end up in the claws of a bear. Everyone was going to have to come to account, which was going to be especially bad

for all those who thought of themselves as the upright, moral ones, you know – God’s favorites. Just going to leave it here that if you actually give those passages a careful reading, it never is about God coming and smiting everyone. God tried that with Noah, remember? Not gonna do that again.

What happens in our Gospels is that the writers take this “Day of the Lord” tradition and they adapt it, extend it, expound on it, flesh it out – literally – in Jesus. So that in our Luke text for today Jesus is speaking. He and his disciples are in Jerusalem, days, maybe hours, before the events that will result in Jesus’ crucifixion begin to unfold. Jesus speaks about how there will be signs, and how the Son of Man WILL come. But, as with the fig tree, events have an order. When it gets bad, don’t be alarmed. It is not the end. Be on watch, don’t be weighed down or distracted. And then the very next thing in the Gospel account is the events of Jesus’ passion, the plot to kill him, the Passover meal, his arrest, and all the rest.

The powerful truth of this juxtaposition is that God is not into smiting the bad guys. There is no talk of God taking lives or destroying things. This is about God, in Jesus, giving God’s own life on that cross to save us, to save us all. ~~– from ourselves~~

Now, Christians have been doing better and worse jobs of interpreting those last few events of that fateful week in Jerusalem and their cosmic consequences over the years. It has been worse when the powerful and privileged have interpreted the death and resurrection of Christ as a way to coerce the poor and ^{op. pressed} ~~privileged~~ to accept their lot in this world and wait for a better day in heaven.

Our interpretation has been better when the proclamation of God’s love for all and the promise of eternal life with God through Christ has been the springboard that propels people to lives of fearless service working for and standing for the well-being of all God’s people. We will make our way

through all that in more detail as the church year unfolds. For today, we can stick to the text and glean 3 take-aways.

1) There will be seasons. Like seasons of a fig tree. There will be seasons in life. There will be seasons in human history. Sometimes things will even go from bad to worse. It's not the end. It is never the end. That means that whatever feels impossible, unbearable, untenable now is not forever. God is not idly standing by. And something else WILL come to pass. Find hope in that.

2) Be on your guard. Don't let your heart get weighed down. And here the text uses the terms dissipation and drunken-ness. Know what dissipation is? Me neither, I had to look it up. It's decadence, excess, over-consumption, self-indulgence. It's basically saying, "don't let yourself get distracted by the world. And don't numb out either. As draining and difficult as it may be, stay engaged in the world.

Why? Why do that? Why even care? Because

3) This world and its well-being is God's project. Because God loves this world, and everything in it, including you. All that love? Not a bit of it is earned. It's grace, it's gift, it's God's goodness, pure and simple. Which was what Jesus came to make evident to us by his life and death. And God's fondest dream is that we live in love in peace, sharing the joys of God's creation together. Sharing the joy of being loved by God together.

That's the project to which we who follow Jesus are called. That's the project in which we who follow Jesus have the honor taking part. That's why we begin the great story cycle of Advent to Pentecost here, reminding ourselves that before his death Jesus said, one day the Son of Man will come and make sure the project is complete. That one day we all live in, and live out, that wondrous love of God. That's pretty good news!

One last little thing: I was having a dilemma about what hymn to pick for today. I love the hymns like *The King Shall Come* or *Savior of the*

Nations Come but those focus too much on the pie-in-the-sky version of things and not enough on the Here/Now aspect of Christ coming. Those songs need some new words I think.

I ended up picking *I Wonder as I Wander* because of one line, one word actually. It's that tricky contraction "ord'n'ry." From when I first learned this song up until I was a pastor I thought the song said that God came for "poor on'ry people like you and like I." I thought all that time is was "ornery" as in cantankerous, crotchety, and a bit stubborn. Which, if you think about it, might be more true. It might be the greater wonder of it all that God in Christ Jesus came to rescue us ornery cuss's from ourselves, to transform us and then to empower us to share the love that changed us, helping God to rescue, transform, and love even the ones we think ought to be smote.

It's Advent 1. Let us take heart and find the wonder in the mystery of God's redeeming love. The mystery that God loves even "them", even you, even me. Enough to send Jesus. Let us have hope in our despair. And together we'll pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, come." Amen.