

The Bethel Pulpit

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BETHEL

LUTHERAN CHURCH

On the web at www.bethel-madison.org

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Text: Luke 21:25-36

I invite you to pray with me:

Come into my heart, Lord Jesus...

come in, come in to stay.

Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, especially when it feels like all hell is breaking loose and my world feels like it is ending, and I have no hope left.

Come in to my heart, Lord Jesus...come in, come in today, come in to stay. Amen.

“Look, the world is always ending somewhere. Somewhere the sun has come crashing down. Somewhere it has gone completely dark. Somewhere the world has ended: with the gun, the knife, the fist...it has ended with the slammed door...the shattered hope.

Somewhere the world has ended with the utter quiet that follows the news from the phone, the television, the sick-room bed. Somewhere it has ended with a tenderness that will break your heart. But wait! In the quietness of the ending, listen!

Wait...watch...listen...for God, to come and sit beside you with a blessing. Yes, for a blessing. God’s blessing does not come to cause despair. God’s blessing is simply here because there is nothing a blessing is better suited for than an ending, nothing that cries out more for a blessing than when your world is falling apart...coming to an end.

God’s blessing will not necessarily fix you...will not mend you...God’s blessing will never give you false comfort ...nor talk to you about one door opening when another one closes. God’s blessing will simply sit itself beside you among the shards of your life, and gently turn your face toward the direction from which the light will come...the blessing of God will gently turn you toward the light of Christ.” By Jan Richardson

This little poem is true, isn’t it? The world IS always ending somewhere....maybe not in YOUR somewhere...or in mine...but somewhere, for someone, life feels like it’s all

over...there is nothing left to hope for. At such times, maybe the harshest news of all is that the world HASN’T ended, that I have to get up tomorrow morning and face another day inside all this darkness.

Here we are...the first week-end of Advent, busy getting ready for Christmas. Our church spaces are all decorated, and we begin lighting the Advent candles, one by one. We’re waiting for Christmas...for the goodness of being with loved ones, waiting to sing, once again, those lovely Christmas carols and to hear those familiar and poetic words, telling of Jesus’ birth: “ *And it came to pass, in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed...* ”

So why? Why, here at the beginning of Advent, do we have such a lesson assigned for worship? Why these words from Jesus from the 21st chapter of Luke, telling of soon-to-be-seen, horrifying destruction and devastation, almost beyond description?

Two weeks ago, Pastor John read from the 13th chapter of Mark, and Jesus spoke similar words that warned us that nothing built by humans will be left standing. In each case, both in Mark and in Luke,

Jesus is about one week away from crucifixion and death. His world would soon be ending...at least his world, living as God’s Son, walking the paths of life with people like you and me. So Jesus spoke clearly about the ending of one’s world from the context of his own life.

Why these words now, just when we are getting ready to celebrate with family and friends our long-standing traditions centered around Christmas?

Maybe these words come to remind us that the season of Advent is a very counter-cultural kind of reality, at least counter-cultural here in America, where you and I are immersed in a cultural that wants us to believe that if we simply buy the right product, we can prevent all bad things from happening.

Our 24/7 advertising campaigns lie to us and lure us into thinking that we can 'buy' a wide variety of 'insurance' against aging (use THIS skin cream and the wrinkles and years will disappear), against pain (take THIS pill and your aches and pains will all disappear...yes ! almost instantly!).

Jesus, at the very least, will always be honest with us, and remind us that nothing we know here on this earth will last forever; everything will eventually be gone. And God will make all things new. In the words of Jesus (Luke 21:33) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away", or as The Message paraphrase of that text says: "Earth and sky will wear out, but my Word will never wear out."

Advent: a time for us to WATCH! WAIT! BE ON OUR GUARD! Looking for Jesus to come among us and bring the newness of God's kingdom into our lives, amidst the shards of destruction that come with divorce...the death of a loved one...the loss of a job...that dreadful medical diagnosis.

You and I know there are no easy fixes for these 'endings'. We know there is no pill to take, no insurance policy to buy that will make our life calamity-proof. Jesus. Jesus. Only Jesus. Sitting alongside of us and also sending us to the side of others, who are broken-hearted and desperate.

You and I: keeping on keeping on, doing the tasks of discipleship in the name of Jesus: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving shelter to the homeless, and comforting those in sorrow.

I sought myself. Myself I could not see.
I sought my God: my God eluded me.
I sought my neighbor and I found all three.

May God lead us, these days of Advent-waiting and expectation, in the seeking out of those who need a hand to hold, a word of presence and blessing, a reason to keep on keeping on, with a boundless hope. The world IS always ending somewhere. God, too, is ALWAYS with us in our endings and in our beginnings.

Amen.