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1 Advent C09 / November 29 / Luke 21:25-36

(Comic strip illustration)

Our readings this morning point to what is coming down the road towards us. They are about the promises that God made when he said through the prophet Jeremiah, "The days are surely coming when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."

So let's stop for just a minute and think about this. What does this promise of God mean to us? And what does it mean when Jesus says to us that a day is coming when the Son of Man will come to us in a cloud with power and great glory? What will these promises mean in the midst of our upcoming busy and hectic lives where our children will expect to be driven from one Christmas activity to the next and ask for things that aren't affordable? What will these promises mean when employers will ask for overtime and the PTA will ask for hours that we don't have to spare? What will all these promises of God about the future *mean* when we are caught up in trying to do all we can do in the present moment, barely managing to live one day at a time, and trying to be all things to a lot of different people?

To me, the promises signify how important it is to remember to stop in the midst of the all our busyness and rejoice. To me, the promises signify the importance of stopping and remembering to pray. Because the promise of God is that the future that will be ushered in by Jesus Christ is not going to be anything like our current present. Therefore we can rejoice and give God thanks ~ because we know that those things which are currently driving us crazy and up the wall ~ and we know that all those things which are contributing to all the wrong in this

world ~ they will all eventually perish away. Through Christ, God has promised that a new heaven and a new earth will come upon us ~ a heaven and a earth that will be filled with everlasting peace, justice, joy and love.

That is why Jesus says: “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, like a trap...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.”

What Jesus means is simply this: that we should be aware of getting so caught up and wrapped up and tied up by the worries of this life ~ that we wind up going through life completely incognizant of Jesus’ presence with us ~ and completely incognizant of the reality of Jesus’ return in the future. So in essence, our readings this morning are inviting us to be alert to ~ and cognizant of ~ the bigger picture.

For example, how many people do you suppose missed Thanksgiving Day last week? I’m not talking about people who weren’t home or who were working ~ I’m talking about people who *were* at home but who became totally engrossed in making the Thanksgiving arrangements, preparing the food, setting the table, pouring the drinks, serving the food, clearing the table, setting out dessert, making the coffee, clearing *those* plates, and washing the dishes ~ and missed Thanksgiving. I’m talking about people who *missed* the excitement of seeing aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, friends ~ people who missed the thanksgiving spirit ~ and people who missed God’s Spirit, too. All those Thanksgivings arrangements are important ~ but they are not exclusive to the main reason that people gather together to ask the Lord’s blessing on their family and on their table.

Thus our passages today confront us and they ask the question ~ what one thing or couple of things have we become so focused upon that they have caused us to lose our context? What one or two things are currently causing us to miss the larger picture that Jesus would have us see in our lives? For some folk, all I may have to say is that there are only 25 shopping days left till Christmas ~ and they're lost already. They're gone! The context of Advent and worshipping God is lost because mentally they have begun constructing lists in their minds. For still other folk, it's more serious matters than Christmas shopping lists that concern them. But the question that the Scripture lessons ask remains the same: have our lives been taken over by one thing or another so much ~ *so much* ~ that we can't appreciate what God is doing all around us nor can we anticipate what God has promised to do for us in the future?

Don't get me wrong ~ Jesus isn't telling us not to be concerned about the big issues of life. He isn't saying not to be concerned about war, hurricanes, floods, and other disasters which seek to convince us that our world is collapsing. What Jesus *is* telling us to do is to not become so *distracted* by them ~ to allow ourselves to become so *trapped* by them ~ that we miss the bigger picture entirely.

That's why Jesus tells us to be alert and to look down the road so that we will not fail to see the presence of God's Kingdom when it is in front of us, radiating with hope. That's why Jesus tells us to be on our guard so that he may come to visit us during this Advent season ~ and not find us with our minds and bodies preoccupied with doing something else.

Such readiness is the attitude of Advent. Of being alert to what is going on around us and especially to what God and Jesus are doing all around us. Advent is all about understanding what the signs around us are trying to tell us about God and His love for us ~ and readying

ourselves and preparing ourselves for the fulfillment of God's Word coming again into our midst.

As part of preparing ourselves and as part of readying ourselves, I'd like to suggest the following spiritual exercise to incorporate into your Advent season. What I'd like to suggest is that you take 15 minutes out of each day and dedicate those minutes to God. 15 minutes. You could certainly use those 15 minutes as prayer time or as time to read the Scriptures and listen to what God is saying to you. You could also use those 15 minutes to write a note to someone, letting them know how your life has been blessed by them. You could use those 15 minutes to call a loved one you haven't spoken to in awhile ~ you could use those 15 minutes to make a donation to a worthy cause.

But try and make it a practice this Advent season to take time to look all around you and specifically plan how you are going to dedicate those 15 minutes to God each day. Let your motto be to "Look down the road." And, with your head and hearts held up high, walk the road towards God's approaching Kingdom in prayer and in hope ~ in righteousness and in love ~ knowing that just as many of God's promises were fulfilled at the birth of Christ, so too will the rest of God's promises be fulfilled ~ and the world will once again recognize its Savior in joy. Amen.