



## **“Real News, Good News”**

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December 2, 2018

### **Scripture (NRSV):**

#### **Luke 21:25-36**

<sup>25</sup> “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. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

<sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>34</sup> “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> 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:**

There's no doubt about it...this text from the gospel of Luke just doesn't sound like Christmas!

And how can it be a proper Advent text, either...a joyous waiting text, a piece of Scripture that generates excitement for Christmas time?

Ah, but it does generate excitement!

All sorts of folks get excited by apocalyptic texts!

When there is yet another earthquake, when something terrible happens among the nations, (and sometimes especially if the uproar is between Israel and its neighbors), then some folks get really riled up!

Someone invariably arises who declares that we are in the end of days. That the great return of Jesus is coming soon.

If comets soar too close to us, if dictatorships arise, if bubonic plague, or HIV or Ebola kill countless people...then people look around and wonder if this is it; are they seeing the great unveiling?

Apocalypse does mean "to uncover, to unveil".

Yet, are these signs of our times unveiling the end of our world?

It has been proposed countless times before.

Certainly around specific calendar years, sometimes around something happening in our solar system, sometimes because of politics. Fiery or persuasive, or fanatical "prophets", foretell the end of us all, and life around us.

Yet the end has not come.

Jesus has not come down on a cloud in great power and glory.

And because it has not happened, I find myself saying to myself, and to you, as we gather in Christian community... "Let's not lose sight of what is going on right now that needs our attention".

If there are people in peril from wars and rumors of wars, in dread from chaos around the world, then *let us focus on peacemaking, and assisting the refugee running from the chaos among the nations.*

If there is fainting and fear, *let us speak of love and grace and mercy to calm those fears.* Whether Jesus comes soon, or late, let us focus on modeling his Way, the Way of peace and inclusion, of welcome and kindness, of self-giving love, healing, restoration.

Then, we will be like the words in Luke:

We will, “stand up and raise your heads, for your redemption is coming near.” (vs. 28)

Friends, this is what I believe:

If we avoid drowning our fear in numbing addiction; if we forego the temptation to hide away from others, hoarding for ourselves; if we face the needs of our bewildered planet home and all its creatures, then it does not matter if Jesus comes tomorrow or in a thousand years...we will know that we have continued to be alert, strong in loving and serving through the difficult times, and prepared to stand before Jesus at his return, hands and hearts open and eyes eager to behold our God. (vs 36)

And the great unveiling itself?

Well, I believe that it will be the great apocalypse of love and justice and mercy coming to our earth, and covering it at last, from east to west, from pole to pole.

It will shock many, and many will indeed be confused and terrified...totally unprepared for a world unveiled in God’s design.

But we, we will lift up our heads! We will look with anticipation at the coming of the transformation of our beloved, muddled planet home.

After a lifetime of study and discussion, struggle and prayer and argument, I will tell you this: I can hardly wait!

I can hardly wait for the great unveiling of God’s beautiful promises, God’s exquisite design for our creation and our co-creatures.

And *that is a Christmas thing*: waiting, impatiently, for God’s coming into our midst. Waiting, eagerly, for Emmanuel, God with Us, at last.

Not God above us, or God beyond us, or God rebuking us, or God destroying us.

God near enough to understand our fears and our terrors, and with us close enough to hold our hands in those dark times, and speak to our sorrows, and show us a way through. With love and mercy and stories told again and again, we find our way to follow the path of life that Jesus modeled. A path of hope, beauty, healing, transformation.

Since Emmanuel is come, and will come again, we do not despair. God is with us, and we are not alone.

This is indeed, the Good News. At this time, and any time. At the beginning of all things, and at the end, at the unveiling, at the apocalypse.