Sunday, 11/28/75

**Luke 21:25-36**

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

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

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 does not catch you unexpectedly, 35like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be 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**

Welcome to Advent. Does anyone else feel like last Advent was more than a year ago? Finally, though, all the signs point to Christmas approaching. Thanksgiving is over, the tryptophan coma has passed, public areas are decorated, radio stations are playing Christmas music, and the sales have started. Based on the catalogues and text messages, L. L. Bean and Best Buy really want me to buy something. Here we are in church lighting the wreath and singing the Christmas hymns. (I try to get through as many Christmas hymns as possible because they’re popular and the window for singing them is short.) It’s a confusing, distracted time: we’re talking about the Baby Jesus and peace on earth while also frantically shopping for the best deals we can find on presents and attending parties and gatherings that we’d rather avoid most years and are scared of this year. What would Jesus about how we celebrate his birth?

More than just Christmas season is strange and confusing these days. People spend most of their time feeling out of sorts.

* Covid: spiking infections, unclear guidelines, people not following protocols, large indoor gatherings—what’s safe?
* Climate change: the world could burn, are we doing anything
* Political scene: injustice, hatred, Pilate’s question “What is truth” seems appropriate (what I want it to be, what I read on Facebook, etc.)
* What do we want from this season?
  + Time with family
  + Sense of God being close
  + Comfort (comfort, comfort, yet my people…)

It may seem strange, then, to have another apocalyptic passage that has Jesus seemingly predict the end of the world.

You might have preferred the Baby Jesus again this week. We’ll get there. First, Luke gives us a glimpse of the end of the story.

* Context: Jesus is in Jerusalem for Passover. He’s going to be crucified soon, and the story will seem to be over and the world will seem to end. But he’ll be resurrected and the story will continue, better than before
* Pain, suffering coming, but then joy—Jesus isn’t overcome
* Larger picture
  + Jerusalem ransacked by Romans in response to insurrection
  + Ongoing wars, confusion, suffering
  + Christ’s return: fear, judgment, but “your redemption is near”
  + Meaning: suffering happens, but it’s not the end of the story; Christ is Lord
* Our own confusion: how can we live/thrive in this situation? How is it possible to have faith?

Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time when he wouldn’t be present with them and their faith would be tested.

This may seem like a strange passage to read during Advent, when we want the Baby Jesus rather than judgment. Jesus is really reassuring us that he’s present, even when the world falls apart.

* Jesus: God become human
  + Immanuel: God with us
  + End of Matthew: I am with you, even to the end of the age
  + Jesus’s return isn’t a sign of our damnation, it’s the time when he redeems us
* How do we live in the meantime?
  + 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 does not catch you unexpectedly, 35like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be 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.”
  + Prayer: the least you can do? The most you can do?