

Advent 1 C: Luke 21:25-36
December 2, 2018
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

Signs of Hope

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Advent is all about finding reason and signs for hope in times of despair. Surely there is enough despair to go around these days. There are worries many have about the results of climate change. There are fires and there is a greater intensity in the storms we experience. The seas are rising. What should we do? Where should we go to live to be safe, many are starting to ask? These are signs of end times. So what should we do?

Yes these are signs of end times, but they are the signs of an old order passing away. When we see them, we should also feel hope, hard though that is, because God is not far away from you and me, and God is our true hope, not buying something new nor moving to some new location. Stay and search for the signs of hope right here, where you are. There are many.

And when there are storms growing in intensity in your personal life, the temptation to be afraid and to desire to save yourself by protecting yourself with all sorts of “moves” is a strong one. When we see problems in our workplace and fear change and layoffs, this is a sign. When our relationships are crumbling through neglect because routine maintenance has not been done, this is also a sign. When what we do is growing further away from who we are is also a critical sign not to ignore. Our general sense of either happiness or satisfaction with our lives is also another sign that the stars are falling out of alignment and are trying to tell us something. Read and heed those signs as they appear in your consciousness. They are warnings that more serious storms are on the horizon.

In the first century, many looked to the stars in heaven to provide a clue as to how they should lead their lives, at least to point out the direction in which they should

head. The Wise Men followed a star to Bethlehem that would indicate a major seismic shift in humanity: the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Today many still pick up the newspaper or look on their computers or I-phones for their astrology and horoscope predictions, looking for guidance or hope for how to live or what to expect today. If they should co-inside with our real experiences, it would seem we could pay them further hedence in the future, reading them more frequently. Human beings have always loved to consult sooth-sayers and palm readers with crystal balls who claim they can predict your future. What they are very practiced at is the art of listening and reflecting back the things they hear from us. We are not used to this, and so we believe in their seeming magical powers of insight into us. Would that people thought of their therapists in the same way, I might add. (But of course, they should not!)

So here we are at the beginning of Advent. The end of the season is in sight: We must be ready by Christmas Eve at 4:00 pm. Cards written, presents purchased, Homes decorated, holiday treats baked or acquired, trees decorated, meals planned and we are prepared with the food purchased for them, gifts wrapped, carols sung, church attended, and so on. That's a lot on our plates for the next three weeks. But no matter what we do, Christmas is coming and will be here soon. And now the most important question, are we spiritually ready for it? The signs are easily recognized that Christmas is coming: Lights and decorations; Carols on the radio; the change in weather and the snow portend that there is big change afoot here. Spiritually, we are at first excited and enthused about it all. As time wears on, some may also wear-out from all their preparations. In the midst of this, one night, when the weather is clear and there are no clouds in the skies, look up at God's celestial decorations celebrating the coming of God's self into the world, look up to the real stars and find hope for yourself and for our world.

We may think that money and credit cards will aid us in our preparations, but you cannot buy the readiness this season demands that way. We must become true givers at heart, instead of acquirers.

Are these the end times? Yes they are, in this sense: The old way of living is passing away. Storms are overcoming the old way of life's viability. What we may have been doing is no longer working for us. It is time for an Advent, a new beginning, a second chance, a fresh start. The old is passing and the new is on its way.

The signs of the season are about new, very special and a real hope that God extends to us. Decorating is a sign to us that something, someone, very new, something much better than what is, is coming and on its way. AMEN

