**12/1/24**

**A Season of Preparation and Hope**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**Luke 21:25-36 (NRSVUE)**

Have you ever managed to read something, and just keep staring at it, or reading it over and over again in hopes of it making more sense? Well, I will admit that this week’s Gospel Reading really got me in that place for a little longer than I would have liked. I of course knew that we would be reading something yet again about end times despite us actually starting out Advent and our new church year together here this Sunday. However, this particular story is just not what I came to really expect for some reason. With that being said, I continued to grapple and wrestle with it until I was hopeful that I got something for you and I to really chew on or think about before sending us all back out there into the world. I know that I had to tag the Holy Spirit in a few times to really be able to deliver something impactful and purposeful, because for some time all I kept getting really hung up on was that dang fig tree. That was not what I meant when I said I wanted you and I to have something to chew on, because I do not even like figs! So, why do we have to be talking about a fig tree anyways? How about a pear tree Mr. Gospel Writer? Let alone why are we even talking about trees at all? I mean, did that manage to catch you all off guard if you happened to pre-read the bulletin from your post-Thanksgiving Wednesday email, or if you just happened to listen to it and hear it here this morning for the first time? Again, I question why in the world we are even talking about summer being near and trees getting leaves when it has been nothing but windy and miserable outside as of late, and the trees are losing all of their leaves, and let alone winter is quickly approaching us anyways.

Alright, I realize it is time for me to calm myself down a little bit here and slow down in order to actually get focused. I know that the first thing that I would really like to do is welcome each and every one of you here, there, and everywhere. That is whether you have grabbed a seat with us here in the church, or whether you have grabbed a seat in your homes or are out and about on the conference call. I am sure you all have had a busy last few days with family or friends and shopping time following Thanksgiving. So, I mean it when I say your very presence and commitment to this community is vital to our weekly growth in the faith and the love of Triune God. I really do appreciate you and thank you for your continued commitment to make this congregation here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church oh so special. “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

I am also glad that you all actually came back this week for the start of our party! You probably thought that I was joking last week when I ended my sermon talking about having a celebration. I mean some people talk about having birthday weeks, but we get to be excited and expectant for the entire birthday month that we will experience together with one another. For Advent is truly **a season of preparation and hope**. We did not just gather together yesterday in this very space to put up the nativity and some trees, or even hang some wreaths and place some candles in the windows. We got together to decorate for the coming of our beloved and glorious King that we learned more about last week. We learned why this very title of King is oh so important for Christ, the world, and for all of us as believers as well. We even learned why it challenged and actually changed the common knowledge, awareness, and very understanding of what typically was considered to be a king too. Christ really shook the thoughts and perceptions of the so-called normal way, and he continues to do so to this very day as well. Christ is our King, for Jesus ruled and testified to the very love and truth of God while present here on this earth as a human just like you and I. The good thing is that the work He did just did not stop when his life ended at 33 some years old. His very ministry and kingdom work continued on through those who followed along with him as his friends and his disciples. To top it all off, that very same ministry and kingdom work also continues on some two-thousand years later following those very examples set forth before us through the very love and admiration that we show from our hearts and minds for one another as his beautiful and wonderfully made creation. We were enabled and empowered to carry on that very message of grace and peace, and we rejoice in being able to do so, especially around the holiday season.

So, as you may have noticed we started our Advent season this morning by lighting one of the many candles here on our Advent wreath. For we indeed are in anticipation of what we know for certain is to come. We are preparing and readying ourselves yet again for the annual birth of a babe in a manger in swaddling clothes that happened well over some two-thousand years ago. However, we are not just celebrating or expecting that annual tradition or birthday that we get to experience with one another during our wonderful Christmas Eve Service. Our very faith and the scriptures remind us that we are waiting and expectant of the ultimate example of Godly and human life to return once again and show us the love and compassion that we can simply only dream of and read about. We are forever reminded that our God will be coming yet again, and not just any regular appearance, but as verse 27 informs us that “‘the Son of Man (will be) coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.” (2) This message has us come to realize that we are not just in anticipation and preparation just during this Advent season either, but we are reminded and called to refocus on what it is like to live a life of daily and yearlong preparation as well.

As you have heard this morning, we did not just start out Advent with a story to make us all feel somewhat upbeat or happy. We did not get one of those all too familiar stories on movies where the family or couple are living happily ever after, and everyone is smiling or hugging and kissing at the end. Instead, we started our new church year out on the very same end times and apocalyptic format that we had read about last week to end that church year. As we carry on in Advent, and we end up together here singing Silent Night during our Christmas Eve Service, we take heed in the fact that we have to learn not just about the annual commemoration of an important birth, but we have to actually learn and hear about the second coming that indeed is marked in scripture and is going to happen. We also need to nudge ourselves and even remind ourselves that we need to be in constant preparation mode. That is despite the fact that no one actually knows the precise time or place despite there being continual signs that we all may think that it is very likely to possibly occur tomorrow, or maybe even later today quite frankly. So, we must continue to ready ourselves and be on watch as we heard this morning in our Gospel Reading.

As I read over the several things I usually do during my research time throughout the week this particular story kind of struck me in a different way, and I am interested to see what you actually think or how you react to it. It goes like this, “Several years ago, there was news coverage on the tragic eruption of a volcano in Colombia. Apparently, many of the people who lived near the volcano for years didn’t believe that it was going to erupt, while other people warned it might erupt very soon. Many of the people were not prepared when the volcano erupted and this resulted in the deaths of a number of people.” (9) Now, we may not have a volcano around the corner, but we do have the ocean, and we sure do have some nasty storms that can come across it at any time. Verse 25 reminds us of that very nature when it speaks of the, “roaring of the sea and the waves.” (2) However, we should not be confused by it, or any signs we hear of. I mean I know we would much rather not think about it most times, but in all truth, it is our very reality. That is the same when it is compared to our faith journey. We must ready ourselves daily in total preparation and anticipation of the return of Christ our King. That is a storm that is always right over the horizon, and even though we may not always talk too much about it outside of these church doors we know He is still coming whether we may still be enjoying our time here on earth or not. That very storm and that very life altering event is going to occur one day for sure. We must also ready and prepare our family and friends, and all of those folks out there that may not even know Christ, or may have possibly fallen away from church or the faith temporarily as well. We can either believe that the storm is not coming and continue living in the here and now, and we can think that the volcano is simply not going to erupt. Then, we can be the ones caught up and lost, or even dead, and that is simply because we chose not to be ready. We do not want to be caught in eternal sadness and regret as we see all the folks that will not get to live on in glory in the eternal kingdom with us because we were waiting for one more sign or one more moment to pass before we fully prepared ourselves and those we truly do care about. We do indeed need to heed the words from verse 28 as we should, “stand up and raise our heads, because our redemption is drawing near.” (2, with emphasis mine “our”)

Then, of course there is nothing like really dialing us into a story and throwing a curveball right in the middle of it, like that good ole fig tree I spoke of earlier. You may be sitting there and asking yourself precisely why this might be so important in this discourse. I for one really tried to make sense of it, and its very placement. However, I was quickly reminded it was yet again another story or parable that Jesus taught with to really draw all of our attention in, and not actually distract us. For that fact, all we need to do is allow our minds and our hearts to open up a little differently, and take in the entire story and picture. That is whether we are seasoned gardeners, or whether we are just folks that happen to have trees in our yards. We of course come to know the cycle is yet the same. That is whether we put seeds or plants in the ground, fertilize and water them, weed, and then watch them grow; or we come to expect that the tree in our yard will yield us some more peaches, plums, apples, pears, or even figs. We know that year after year there is an annual cycle and annual expectation. We are then reminded that these plants or trees actually are similar to ourselves. For the years and time go by and we expect the same thing, that is whether we plant the same garden, or plant more, or we just simply care for our tree and the soil it is in. We want more yield, and we should expect more from ourselves if we really do focus on the Word and our faith. We need to continually cultivate ourselves by watering and feeding ourselves, and even weeding at times so that we can ensure that we grow year after year.

As I close things out here with this sermon, and we enjoy our proverbial figs together, and we come to fully digesting this Gospel Reading, we come to realize this particular mindset from David Lose. “From Moses to Martin Luther King, Jr., history is full of examples of those who, because they had been to the mountaintop, had peered into the promised land, and had heard and believed the promise of a better future, found the challenges of the present not only endurable, but hopeful. We, too, amid the very real setbacks, disappointments, or worries of this life, can “stand up and raise [our] heads” because we have heard Jesus’ promise that our “redemption draws near.” (8) Verse 36 truly tells us everything we must do in one simple sentence. Let me read that for you yet again. “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.” (2) Let us all do that together and with one another as we ready ourselves during this season of Advent in continued preparation to receive the ultimate gift of a child in a manger, and the very gift of grace delivered to us through the cross and resurrection. Let us mark another holiday season with the love and light of Christ, and let us ensure we carry that on through the days and year ahead as we live in and through this very **Season of Preparation and Hope**.

Amen!

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 December 1st, 2024

 1st Sunday of Advent

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

 © 2018

 Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday of Advent

 One does not need secret biblical knowledge or complicated calculations to discern

 the arrival of the end

 December 1, 2024

 Commentary on Luke 21:25-36

 Troy Troftgruben

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 Even during earth-rending moments, God is near

 November 28, 2021

 Commentary on Luke 21:25-36

 Audrey West

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 How is it possible, a seminarian wondered, to reconcile Luke’s image of Jesus’

 eschatological return “with power and great glory” (Luke 21:27b) to the Christmassy

 reports of the infant Jesus, tender and mild, awaiting us at the end of the Advent

 season?

 November 29, 2015

 Commentary on Luke 21:25-36

 Robert P. Hoch-Yidokodiltona

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 Charles Dickens is said to have said, “Train up a fig tree in the way it should go, and

 when you are old sit under the shade of it.”

 December 2, 2012

 Commentary on Luke 21:25-36

 Karl Jacobson

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 First Sunday of Advent (Year C)

 Advent is a season that messes with our sense of time.

 November 29, 2009

 Commentary on Luke 21:25-36

 David Lose

(9) SermonCentral.com

 Fear Not, Be Prepared Series

 Contributed by Garth Wehrfritz- Hanson on Nov 23, 2003

 Scripture: Luke 21:25-36

 Denomination: Lutheran

(10) SermonCentral.com

 Ready Or Not Here I Come

 Contributed by Tim Zingale on Nov 27, 2006

 Scripture: Luke 21:25-36

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Luke 21:25-36 (NRSVUE)**

 God will fulfill God’s purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment

 abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror,

 but God’s people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God’s

 promised redemption.

 [Jesus said:] 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. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the

 world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see ‘the

 Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. 28 Now when these

 things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your

 redemption is drawing near.”

 29 Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon

 as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is

 already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that

 the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away

 until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven 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, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the

 whole earth. 36 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.”

**(Not Used)**

**Theme Statement: What is God doing in or behind this text?**

**(Active verb, saving or empowering action, complete thought, and a simple short sentence)**

**(Not Used)**

**Four Page Method**

**Page One (Trouble in the Text) (Characters Only)**

**Page Two (Trouble in the World) (Us Only)**

**Page Three (Grace in the Text) (God & Characters)**

**Page Four (Grace in the World) (God & Us)**

**(Not Used)**

**Sermon Unity Elements: The Tiny Dog Now Is Mine**

**Text (41-42):**

**Theme (42-48):**

**Doctrine (48-50):**

**Need (50-52):**

**Image (52-56):**

**Mission (56-57):**