

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

Second Sunday in Advent (Populus Zion) (2020)

Lift Up Your Heads

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“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28, ESV)

Pastors are often faced with trying to bring spiritual comfort and healing to those affected by past events, the fear of future events, and the uncertainty and fear of present events. I believe it can be stated with certainty, that our personalities are profoundly affected by what we expect to happen. A spirit of hopeful expectancy is an important element for a happy and healthy spiritual outlook. If the future looks bleak, we are easily overcome by dread and unhappiness. If you are among those who, with troubled hearts and anxious minds, anticipating nothing but evil from the days that are to come, then you will find life threatening, fearful, and insecure. But if you are confident in the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you need not fear.

But today the world is overcome by fear. COVID-19 has the world in its death grip. Fearful of being contaminated, people are staying home, afraid to venture out. Afraid to go shopping, to visit family, or even to worship God in His house. Making matters worse, so called worship leaders are encouraging their parish members to stay home, to hunker down, to receive God's Word via the internet. This might comfort some, but following this course leaves much to be desired. True enough, one might receive the Word of reconciliation on the internet, but they receive it without our Lord's blessed Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism. The covenants of God through which He personally comes to you, assuring you of the forgiveness of your sins. I do not believe God had in mind shutting down His house of prayer and His altar of reconciliation and forgiveness for a viral infection. In such times we should rather seek God where He can be found, in His holy temple.

In the Gospel text for this morning, Christ does not tell us that our lives will be free of problems, or free of disaster. He begins this discourse with His apostles by telling them of near time events which point to the Last Day. He tells them the future will bring destruction, saying, ***“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.” (Luke 21:10–12, ESV)*** This is the time of the church, this is today. Wars, natural disasters, famines and pestilence, such as the bubonic plague, the Spanish influenza, and now, today, COVID-19 are merely signs that the end of the world is coming, but the end is not here yet. When the Last Day comes, the fear that will grip the world will be a fear never before known, but it will be a fear known only by unbelievers, for believers will know what is happening and they will rejoice, *Lifting Up Their Heads*, to see our Lord Jesus coming on the clouds.

Shifting the focus of His discourse with the apostles regarding those signs leading up to the end times, to the Last Day itself, He begins by saying, ***“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For***

the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” (Luke 21:25–26, ESV) What is this thing that is going to happen to us and to the world? What is it that can possibly affect the lives of all men living and dead and bring our human history to its culmination? Nothing less than an apocalyptic, catastrophic change in the heavens and the earth indicating that the world is coming unglued. We refer to this event every time we confess the words of the ecumenical Creeds, such as Nicene Creed, saying, “*he shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.*” At some future date, known only to God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who long ago ascended into heaven, withdrawing His visible presence from this world, will return. That is the reason, we who are followers of Christ, live watchful lives in great anticipation of that glorious event. This is an essential part of our Christian faith. It is an indispensable part: The Day of the Resurrection.

However, there are multitudes of men and women in our time who regard the idea that Jesus will return to earth with scoffing unbelief. It is not only atheists and the worldly who avow this, but many people who profess to believe in God. They do not believe that the historical Jesus, who dwelt upon the earth will return to this earth at the end of time. They assume the attitude that only simple-minded people would believe something like that. However, this attitude is not new. The Apostle Peter had to contend with such mockery and scorn in His day. Of these he said: “. . . ***in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation***” (2 Peter 3:3-4). Rejecting the coming of Christ on the Last Day, many believe, teach, and confess that a day will come when the world will find the bones of Jesus. Oh, woe to these on the Last Day.

Those who reject the second Advent of Christ, also reject the first Advent of Christ. Now anyone can believe that a man named Jesus lived in this world, but only a Christian believes that He came into the world. Those who deny the incarnation of God in Christ, who refuse to believe that in Jesus the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, are the same people who regard the second Advent of Christ as an absurdity. But those who believe that God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, and in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily, these are the very same people who are waiting to *Lift Up Their Heads* at His coming. They are constantly watchful for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Jesus knows how important it is for you to live a watchful life, and there is a sense of urgency in His voice when He says that this day will come upon you as a “***thief in the night***” (1 Thess. 5:2). That day when you “***will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory***” (Luke 21:27, ESV). will come suddenly and unexpectedly. “. . . ***it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth***” (Luke 21:35, ESV). There will not be a moment’s warning, therefore; “***Be always on the watch, and pray***” (Luke 21:36, ESV).

Such an attitude of constant watchfulness is not easy for us. Often, we must acknowledge that we think of the Last Day as something that probably will never happen to us. We find this world in which we live very absorbing. Perhaps it is disturbing to think that this familiar world of ours, in which we work and play and buy and sell, in which we earn our living and raise our families, and pursue our ambitions—that this world could at any moment come to a catastrophic end. Jesus understands our problem and therefore very earnestly and lovingly He warns us against this deadening effect of worldliness, saying, “***Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap***” (Luke 21:34, ESV). Here, Jesus is warning you against complacency.

However, the central message of today’s text is the anguish and terror that exist not for believers, but for unbelieving humanity. Oh, like you, they may live securely today, but a day will come when anguish and terror will overtake them. This will be their emotional state on the

Last Day when the powers of heaven are disrupted, and it will be their souls emotional state if they die before the Last Day. On that day, just as on the Last Day, the anguish and terror of hell will overcome them.

However, if the coming of the Son of Man intensifies the fear of unbelievers, it is just the opposite for believers. For the faithful the Last Day is Good News. In our text Jesus gives you six admonitions to help you prepare ***“to stand before the Son of Man.” (Luke 21:36, ESV)*** He says, ***“to straighten up,”*** to ***“raise or lift you head,”*** to ***“see for yourselves,”*** to ***“know the kingdom is near,”*** to ***“watch, that is to pay attention to,”*** and to ***“stay awake.”***

These words are constantly placed before you through the mouth of your pastor. This pastoral word assures you that the end of the world is not a reason for fear, but a reason to stand tall and *Lift Up Your Head*, to look up in the heavens, because life in the presence of the Eternal One is about to begin. Here our Lord admonishes the baptized to exercise their faith when confronted with apocalyptic events. Don't be like a pagan who blissfully rejects the Last Day. Instead, look up to see the Christ who brings you the glory of His eternal kingdom. Moreover, don't be like the one in the parable of the sower who is ***“choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” (Luke 8:14, ESV)*** Our Lord implores you to avoid these things by keeping a clear mind and a faithful heart, while *Lifting Up Your Head* and watching, ***“For [the end] will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.” (Luke 21:35, ESV)***

So if your faith is weak and wanting and you fear death, then I would encourage you to seek the Lord in prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith, remembering that our Lord Jesus said to St. Paul, ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9, ESV)*** He says it also to you. Furthermore, God has said, ***“He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.” (Psalm 72:13, ESV)*** He has also said He will, ***“Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.” (Isaiah 35:3, ESV)*** Therefore ask for help and the Lord will give it. He will give you strength to *Lift Up Your Head* in the midst of trials and tribulations, in the midst of COVID-19, and in the midst of other tragedies in your life. Furthermore, He will give you strength on the Last Day, to know that on that day you will be with Him for all eternity, living in the peace and tranquility of heaven.

No more chaos, no more sickness, no more wars, no more earthly disasters, no more fear, no more tears. You will be with God in His Paradise living the life He intended for Adam and Eve, righteous before Him as you live in His Righteousness. Thus, as a follower of Christ there is no need to fear. You will be seated with Jesus at the banquet feast.

Therefore, *Lift Up Your Head*. As a follower of Christ, living with confidence, immersed in the love of Christ, in the certainty of your Baptismal birth, reborn as a child of God, robed in the righteousness of His Son, forgiven of your sins, and given to gift of faith to live as a believer of Jesus Christ in the assurance of the promises of the Gospel and His atoning sacrifice which has justified you before God. Living by faith, you can and will live with your head always *Lifted Up Looking to Jesus*. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen