

### **Luke 21 v25-36**

Julian of Norwich a 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic who received visions from God, once wrote,

The Lord showed me a small hazelnut,

In the palm of my hand.

“What can this be?”

“It is all that is made – it is all of creation.”

“But how can it all survive?”

“It shall survive for ever because I love it”

“And then I saw three truths -

One God made it, two God loves it;

and three that loves sustains and nourishes it”.

In this little word picture, we find hope for our world.

One God made it. Two God loves it and three that love sustains and nourishes it.

On this first Sunday of Advent, our theme is hope against all the odds.

What is hope, someone once asked? “Faith is believing that God will do what he said; hope is a confident looking forward to the fulfilment of the promise” AW Pink 35

A confident looking forward.

Faith is believing in God, Hope gives us a direction to travel.

Paul said three things will remain, faith hope and love...yes, if we have hope then life will go on.

Jesus is a realist, he speaks of the chaos and calamity that will come upon the world, but in the midst of it all, he has three things to tell us, and by living out those three things, in place of fear comes hope.

Our passage from Luke's gospel are words from Jesus in the Temple. His final visit, and some of his final words; the next chapter, is the Passover and Judas' betrayal.

So, his death was imminent, and his cross was now in sight.

To set our reading in context, Luke 21 begins with Jesus commending the selfless giving of the widow, who gave her two small mites, all that she had to live on. This self-giving was to be reciprocated on Jesus' cross, as he gave everything for us.

But before this was to happen, the disciples ask Jesus about the final times on earth, and what will be the sign that they are about to happen.

This was a common conversation at the time of Jesus; the Jews believed in two ages, the present age and the age to come and in between these two ages was the Day of the Lord. Jesus describes this day to them.

It will be a terrible time of cosmic upheaval and destruction, the desperate birth pangs of a new age to come.

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and disease in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven and the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed. But before all this the disciples would be persecuted.

But there was hope for the followers of Jesus, their hope was the Second Coming of our Lord. Jesus was certain that he would come again and the early church waited for his arrival.

Jerusalem was indeed destroyed by the Romans, but 2000 years have passed and we still await the coming our Lord. That is what Advent is all about, reminding us to be patient and to wait for his coming again to us.

So, we pick up Jesus' account of the last times in v 25.

Our reading today may fill us with dread and fear as we contemplate the end times. I can remember as a young boy asking my mum that same question, when will the end come? Well, it comes at some point for everyone but we are not told when the end of the world will come.

But, Jesus doesn't want us to be weighed down with anxiety about these things; it should be quite the opposite.

Jesus wants us to be people who are aware of what's going on in our world but be people who are filled with hope.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15 v13:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”

Despite the external circumstances of the world round about us disintegrating and imploding, Jesus reminds his disciples that the God we worship is a God of hope and in our passage today, we are encouraged to do three things that are hopeful.

Luke 21 v25, he begins with painting a bleak picture.

**<sup>25</sup>“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; <sup>26</sup> men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.**

Now that is a terrible picture of life on earth and it speaks of the destiny of humanity. As we look out on our world we see these things, the Catholic theologian Daniel O Leary wrote about the world that he saw “the continuing assaults on the fragile human spirit are relentless. They drag us all into dark places. Waves of brutality, savagery and pure evil daily deepen the human stain, appealing to the potential sinfulness in all of our hearts, the hidden racism, the smouldering anger, the rebellion against the rich and the powerful. How long can the centre hold? Are we approaching a tipping point of unimaginable magnitude? The last thing to collapse wrote Albert Einstein is the centre. A bleak picture of our world.

“History is going somewhere” wrote our own Willie Barclay.

The stoics regarded history as circular – every 3000 years it reinvented itself, consumed by a great conflagration and then it started again but the Christian faith informs us that history has a goal and that goal is realised when Jesus is revealed as Lord of all.

Barclay writes, “That is all we know and all that we need to know”.

It is enough to know that he is coming back for us, and we should stand, look up and be alert but in the meantime there is plenty of work for the church to do. However, we shall see the Son of Man coming in glory.

We have hope because this is God's world - God made it, God loves it; and that loves sustains and nourishes it - God is in control.

<sup>Psalm</sup> 31 v 15 “My times are in your hands; So Jesus encourages us to have hope in chaos.

**Firstly, we are to stand up and lift up our heads because our redemption is drawing near.**

Body language is important – we are to act like people of faith and not go about in despondency. When God's judgement comes, there will be no defence lawyer in our corner – for we won't need one - God is the sole judge. The only defence that we will have is the sacrifice of Jesus – the Son of Man - so what a comfort to know that He will return and return in power and glory and bring redemption.

He has bought us with a price, and that price was his cross and that's what saves us from God's judgement.

Advent focusses on both Christ's coming into this world as a baby, and his return to this world as the Lord, and both are glorious events. That's why we sing "O come, O come, Emmanuel...It's an invitation for Jesus to come again.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel

**Advent is a time for us to stand up and lift up our heads for our redemption is near. It is a time to praise God and in the words of Paul be filled with joy and peace. That's my invitation for you today on this first Sunday of Advent, don't be fearful rather be joyful and be filled with peace for our Redeemer is coming back soon.**

So, we must continue to trust – trust means continuing to hope in what we cannot see – Hebrews 1v1

Jesus gives them these words of hope, Stand up and Lift up your head for your deliverance is here. He is coming to deliver you and me from the end times, and to take us with him into his glory. Stand up and lift your head, it's a call to look up and be bold and strong, joyful and filled with peace, and trust in the coming of Jesus, because your redemption is drawing near.

**Secondly, Look at the fig tree and when it sprouts leaves the summer is near, this tells us that Kingdom of God is near.**

This is a simple instruction, and one which gives us hope, it's an instruction to look at nature and see in nature the promise that God will return. How good are we at reading signs? When we drive our cars, it's important that we observe the road signs, otherwise we will end in trouble, and so Jesus is encouraging them to observe the signs of the end times, and I suppose each generation has seen signs of the end times and it's not for us to say when that will happen, however we have to keep alert, because he might return at any moment, and goodness me, there are plenty of signs in our world, at the moment that we need him to return. We pray for this every week, Your Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven. A Kingdom of joy, peace and love.

**The word of comfort from the fig tree when it bursts into life is that we should know that the Kingdom of God is near.**

That is comfort because the Kingdom of God is in total reverse to the kingdom of this world, the Kingdom of God, is a Kingdom where his peace will reign and in the words of the Apostle John, there will be no more pain or suffering, separations or war. The Bible has some lovely word pictures of this coming kingdom, where the lion and the lamb will lie down together, and the child will play near the serpent's nest and not get stung – no more enmity - no more fear, for we will be in the presence of the king of peace. The Kingdom of God is near, that's our hope as Christians, and one in which we build our Christian lives upon. We are building our lives, so that we will be ready for the Kingdom of God.

**Thirdly, Be alert – to stand before the son of man.**

<sup>34</sup> “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.

Here is a warning for us not to become overwhelmed by the end times; not to become obsessed with them or to become fearful of the world that we live in – not to become distracted from the hope that we have and the promises that we have in God. Not to find other sources of comfort outside of the grace and love of God.

Yes, we have to be alert and to be on our guard but at the same time we must draw hope from the coming of the son of man for that is our destiny, and that is what we have to look forward to.

The Christian faith points to a glorious hope, which will eclipse anything that we have experienced here on earth – a hope that is for all eternity. This is not our permanent home but this is our journey to reach it.

Our permanent home is found in Jesus and in his grace and mercy.

So, I want you to leave this Advent morning, trusting in Jesus, that he has already accomplished our salvation, and his cross has been the price for us to know God's joy and peace – start Advent with this joy and peace in your hearts and do not be afraid of what's going on in the world around you, embrace the love of God, and know in your hearts that God is in control and he is coming soon, and in the words of Julian of Norwich:

“And then I saw three truths -

One God made it, two God loves it;

and three that loves sustains and nourishes it”.

Amen