

Advent 2
Luke 21:25-36
The Signs of Jesus' Coming
Pastor James Preus
Trinity Lutheran Church
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“Now when you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Our Lord Jesus tells us that there are appointed signs for the coming of the Son of Man in glory. For those who listen and believe Jesus' word, these signs are a great comfort, reminding us that our redemption is coming near. Yet, for those who reject Jesus' word, these signs are ignored and explained away or, as is often the case, they cause great distress and anxiety in the world. Jesus wants us to pay attention to the signs. But he does not want us to speculate as to their meaning. Rather, he wants us to turn to his holy Word with its promises for their sure interpretation.

It is par for the course that people ignore, misinterpret, and scoff at the signs God gives us. Take the rainbow for example. The rainbow is one of the most beautiful representations of God's love and forgiveness. After violently destroying the world and killing everything on it with a catastrophic deluge, God fixed his bow in the sky as a sign of his covenant with all flesh that he would never again destroy the earth and kill all living things with a flood. Now, when we Christians see the rainbow, we are reminded that rather than destroying sin by killing all sinners with a flood, God washes away all sin in us through Baptism, through which we also are placed safely into the holy ark of the Christian Church. The rainbow, not only beautiful, is a sign of God's love, patience, and forgiveness.

Yet, the world scoffs at this meaning of the rainbow. They think because they can explain the natural process by which a rainbow is formed, that light reflecting and refracting as it hits raindrops in the sky forms a spectrum of multicolored light, that God must not have created it. As if He who created light and wrote the laws of nature could not use those same laws to perform a sign. What's even worse, the rainbow, the oldest sign of God's covenantal love, has been hijacked to be a symbol celebrating carnal lust, sodomy, sexual perversion, and the destruction of God's ordained distinctions between man and woman. The rainbow, which should be used by Christian parents to teach their children of God's love and forgiveness, is now used by radicals to push the acceptance of abnormal sexual behavior and dangerous

sexual philosophies upon our little children by means of public libraries, schools, and popular children shows and movies.

And so, the signs of the end times are treated no differently by the unbelieving world. Jesus says that there will be signs in sun and moon and stars. Many falsely interpret this to believe that there will be sudden supernatural signs in the sky directly before Christ's return, so that all will know that Christ is coming. Yet, Jesus also tells us that he will come as a thief in the night and that people will continue as in the days of Noah, eating and drinking, marrying and giving into marriage. Rather, there will be and have been since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem signs in the sky that Jesus is coming soon. Now it is certainly possible that some of these signs will have no natural explanation, as when God caused the sky to go dark in the middle of the day during Jesus' crucifixion when there could not have been a solar eclipse at that time. Yet, many of these signs will have natural explanations, just as the rainbow does. Nevertheless, they remain signs fixed by God of the impending return of Christ.

Solar and lunar eclipses, red harvest moons, meteor shows and giant comets that light up the sky, these all have natural explanations for their occurrence, yet they remain signs of Christ's coming. They're dismissed by those who think natural processes determine the purpose of natural phenomena. Yet, our Lord Jesus determines their purpose. Their purpose is to alert his Christians to lift up their heads and pay attention, because their Redeemer is coming soon.

Some of the signs will cause great anxiety and perplexity: wild hurricanes, destructive tsunamis, earth quakes, wild fires, and the list of destructive natural disasters go on, so much so, that there are many in power who desire to upend our entire economy in order to get ahold of the reigns of the climate which causes many of these natural calamities. There have been and will be wars and rumors of wars, genocides, nations rising and falling, governments becoming destabilized. All these events will cause swooning and anxiety. Yet, without the revelation of Scripture, they will not cause people to pay attention to Jesus' return. Rather, quite the opposite. Those who do not believe Jesus' word will become even more enraptured by the things of this world. They'll be so preoccupied with the cares of this life that they will not notice even the most obvious sign of Jesus' coming or the clearest sermon of Jesus' grace and

forgiveness. Unless you listen to the words of Jesus, Satan will only use these signs of the end times to further distract you from Christ.

But we who have been enlightened by the Gospel and sanctified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit should look at these signs as continued reminders of God's grace and forgiveness and of the necessity to repent of our sins every day. Jesus compares it to the fig tree and all the trees pushing out their leaves, so that you know that summer is coming. That is what these signs are. It is quite remarkable. The same signs that cause people to fret and faint, fear and stress out, are the same signs that bring calm and comfort to us. Why? Because Christ comes with healing in his wings. Jesus says that our *redemption* is drawing near.

Now, what does redemption mean? Well, it means that we were bought with a price, the very precious blood and innocent suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. God became man! That's what we're preparing to celebrate on Christmas. The eternal God, who has no body, but is an infinite Spirit, who cannot be contained by heaven or the heaven of heavens, took on our flesh and bone, assumed a human soul, and was laid in a manger by his virgin mother. He nursed at her breast and slept in her lap, nodding off to the sweet sound of her lullabies. How beautiful! How mysteriously mild! And he did this in the fulness of time in order to prepare himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Christ Jesus fulfilled the Law in our place, in our flesh and blood, and he was punished in our stead. He is our ransom, our scapegoat. He paid the price for our sins by himself being the payment. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

That is the Gospel. That is the Good News we confess and hold dear. And that is why we are not troubled by signs of the coming of Christ, because we know why he is coming. He is coming to claim his prize. Jesus, the Godman, will return in the same body that was born of the Virgin Mary, that was laid in a manger, that touched lepers and cleansed them, that carried his cross on his back, that was nailed to that cross and laid in the tomb, which truly rose again from the dead on the third day. That same body we will see upon the clouds. We will gaze upon those scars on his hands and feet, which were formed when nails were driven into them. They will remain as receipts of purchase. Christ Jesus has paid for us. We are his.

That is what it means that our redemption is coming. It means that our Lord is coming to bring us to himself to live with him forever. It means we will enjoy eternal salvation.

Has a season ever snuck up on you? It has for me. This past year I was still thinking it was winter when suddenly it was summer. Of course, it was not sudden. There were lots of signs. I was just distracted. I wasn't paying attention. My children aren't that way. They notice the buds on the trees becoming tender and turning green, the return of seasonal birds, that it's warm enough outside to ride a bike. This is how we should be with the signs of Jesus' coming. We should notice these things taking place, and we should be filled with joyful anticipation that Jesus will fulfill his promise to us.

Jesus warns us to watch ourselves lest we too be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and the day of his return come upon us like a trap. This is a real danger. We are not of the world, but we are in the world. It's easy to become distracted, to get anxious, to think that the cares of this world are more pressing than the things of God's kingdom. And this is common among Christians on earth. What do people find more important? Working for money or going to church to hear the Gospel? Well, you need money to pay your bills, to eat, and to live! Okay. What's more important? Going to church to hear the Gospel or playing some game? Well, the team depends on us and we've made a commitment. Alright. And so, the choice to come and hearing the Gospel always seems to lose. It's not that big of a deal though, right?

It is a very big deal. This is exactly what Jesus warns about. The cares of this life, no matter how important or trivial they may be are constantly used to distract you and your children from God's Word and promise. And when they consistently win, eventually God's word and promise is forgotten. You don't know when Christ will return. There are signs that he will come soon. But again, if you are not listening to Jesus, then the signs won't do you any good anyway.

Watch and pray Jesus teaches us. You watch by listening to God's word, so that you can recognize the signs for what they are. And you pray according to God's Word and promise. Whatever you ask for in faith, God will give you. To ask in faith means to ask according to God's promise. This means that we should pray for what Jesus tells us to pray for. He tells us to pray that we will have strength to escape these things that are going to take place, so that we may stand before the Son of Man. What Jesus

means is that we should pray that the distractions of this world would not cause us to lose our faith, but that we would continue to repent of our sins and believe in God's forgiveness for Christ's sake, so that when Christ comes, we will stand with a good conscience without fear. It is God who will strengthen us to withstand temptation and stand on that day. And he will strengthen us by the power of the Gospel of Christ. So, stay awake and keep watch. Listen to Jesus' voice. Repent of your sins and believe that God forgives you. Pray to God for increased faith and endurance. And when you see these signs, take heart, because your redemption is coming near. Amen.