

Natalie W. Bell  
 November 28, 2021  
 First Sunday of Advent

***Get Ready!***  
***Luke 21:25-36***

*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. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, **stand up and raise your heads**, because your redemption is drawing near.”*

*<sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, **but my words will not pass away.***

*<sup>34</sup> “**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, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> **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.”*

These are some **powerful words about Jesus’s return**,  
 When he comes to redeem all humanity and all of creation.  
 And our Jeremiah reading has the promise of salvation  
 and the arrival of the Savior.

These readings may seem **strange** to us—but they are **perfect for advent**.  
 Today is the **First Sunday** of the 4 week season of Advent.  
 Which is all about waiting---for **two different arrivals**:  
 The arrival of the **infant** Jesus in Bethlehem,  
 and the arrival of **Jesus**, when he comes again to redeem all of creation.  
 Advent is the time to get ready **for both arrivals**.  
 So, this time is about **paying attention, and being alert**.

In **Luke 21** Jesus is talking about his **second coming**,  
 Just before he goes to the cross to die.  
 His words may sound a bit mysterious to us,

but to the first audience they would have been familiar, because of the *prophets*.

To some, such words about final judgment and end times, are *scary*.  
The famous “*Left Behind*” book series was built on passages like this, emphasizing the fear and terror of people being snatched up at the end of time, and others being ‘left behind’.

But actually both Luke and Jeremiah are *words of HOPE*.  
Especially to people who face *any kind of suffering*.  
Because today’s readings are about a *day when God will make all things right*.  
And Jesus will bring *justice*.

*The Message Bible in Jeremiah 33 says it so well:*  
*Watch for this: The time is coming’—when I will keep the promise I made to the families of Israel and Judah. When that time comes, I will make a fresh and true shoot sprout from the David-Tree. ...He will set things right. ...The motto for the city will be, “God Has Set Things Right for Us.*

Mary sings something similar in her *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-55:

She says: *His mercy is for those who fear him*  
*from generation to generation.*

<sup>51</sup> *He has shown strength with his arm;*  
*he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.*

<sup>52</sup> *He has **brought down** the powerful from their thrones,*  
*and lifted up the lowly;*

<sup>53</sup> *he has **filled the hungry** with good things,*  
*and sent the rich away empty.*

<sup>54</sup> *He has **helped** his servant Israel,*  
*in remembrance of his mercy,*

So the question for us now is,  
*do we have HOPE for the day when God will make all things right?*

I’ve got to say that when the holidays roll around,  
I am more than *ready for Jesus* to come back any time now,  
and make things right!

What about you?

Jeremiah's words are *hopeful*—with good reason.  
 The original audience were God's people—  
 who had been captured, and taken away from their homeland and Temple and  
 everything familiar—  
*Exiled by force*, from Jerusalem to Babylon.

The prophet Jeremiah was given the task  
 of *warning God's people* about their impending exile....  
 and then giving them *a word of HOPE to sustain them until it was over*.  
 In fact, God asked Jeremiah to buy a piece of land before the exile,  
 To remind the people that God would one day restore them to their homeland!

The *exiles needed to hear* God's hope!  
 They needed to know that God would make everything right one day....  
 just like we *followers of Jesus* need to hear the same message, don't we?

Jesus spoke several times about *being ready* for the end,  
 like the ten *bridesmaids* having their lamps of oil ready,  
 or the separating of the *sheep and the goats* for final judgment.  
 Jesus promised he would come again, judge all people,  
 and then redeem all creation, making all things new.

***This is what we wait for at Advent!***

This First Sunday of Advent is like the *New Year's Day*  
 of the church liturgical calendar!  
 It's why the readings are all about *HOPE*.  
 and the *FUTURE*.

About the *One who has come, and is coming again!*

That's what's so *UNIQUE about Christian preparation for Christmas*.  
 The season of Advent reminds us of the *end* of time,  
 So that we'll be truly *prepared for ALL* time.

It's very *counter-cultural*—but it has *so much MEANING*.  
 There's no silver bells or decking the halls,  
 because it's *a DIFFERENT kind of preparation*  
 than the world does for December 25th.

These are words about living in an *in-between time*,  
 aware of Jesus *with us*, but waiting for Him to *come again*.  
 These are words about being *alert and ready*,  
 because *no one knows* when Jesus will come again.

People do speculate that the end is near...  
 but really no one knows when the end is coming...*it's not ours to know*.  
***Jesus said so himself.***  
 We may see *signs* of the end—but that's just to encourage us to be ready!  
 To open our eyes and look for God.

All we are called to do is *be ready*.  
 And have ***HOPE*** that He is coming—now and again.  
 That's the theme of Advent.

Some of you may know of the life of German Lutheran pastor  
***Dietrich Bonhoeffer***, who ministered during WWII.  
 He was a member of the Nazi resistance, and the Confessing Church of Germany.  
 He wrote about Advent from a concentration camp,  
 where he had been sentenced to death for his role in the resistance against Hitler.

He wrote to his parents from prison before his death:  
*He said: Advent...is a season of waiting, but our whole life is an Advent season,  
 that is, a season of waiting for the last Advent,  
 for the time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth”  
 Celebrating Advent means being able to wait... ...  
 For the greatest, most profound, tenderest things in the world, we must wait.*  
 He encouraged his parents to celebrate Advent without him,  
 because none of us knows how much time we really have left.  
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*.

***Indeed, our whole life IS an Advent season***—a time of waiting for Christ.  
 And it's a time of waiting with ***HOPE***—  
 because we are waiting for the ***greatest gift*** of all time.

Meanwhile, we have hope because ***Jesus is with us right NOW!***  
 That's why they called Jesus—***Emmanuel***—***which means 'God With Us'***.  
 As believers, we can celebrate Christmas in a special way,  
 Because Jesus is already in our daily lives,  
 if we have the eyes to see Him!

Could that make this season more *meaningful for you*?  
 What does it mean to you—to have *eyes and ears* looking for Jesus---  
 Because we never know when we will see or hear Him?

Sometimes I *hear Him* in the voice of a loved one,  
 Or in time spent with one of you.  
 Sometimes I *see Him* in the eyes of a needy person,  
 Or someone who is walking through a dark valley.

***What about you?***

When do you *hear* Jesus? When do you *see* Him?  
 Are you looking for him in this season?

Christmas can be such a hard time of year,  
 So, we need ***HOPE***—hope that we will see Jesus.  
 We need encouragement to ***be ready, and alert.***

And we need to know that it's ok to long for ***justice and goodness.***  
 a day ***when Jesus makes everything right again!***  
 Especially with all the pain and suffering and injustice in our world right now!  
 We do long for Jesus to set it all right, don't we?

So, what if let God ***replace*** our ***sadness, or anxiety...***  
 Or even the ***sorrow*** so many of us feel at Christmas,  
 With ***HOPE?***

What if we asked for that this Christmas?

Famous theologian Jurgen Moltmann  
 wrote a book called *Theology of Hope*, and he said this:  
***“I tried to present the Christian hope no longer as such an opium of beyond but  
 rather as the divine power that makes us ALIVE in this world”***

I love that.

Christian hope is ***the divine power that makes us ALIVE in this world.***

The Theology of Hope. Jurgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, 1st ed (San Francisco:  
 Harper and Row, 1988), pg. 4.

Isn't that great?

**God's HOPE makes us alive**—especially at Christmas,  
When we might find ourselves **feeling down**  
Because we are surrounded by images of happiness,  
But in reality **we are suffering**.

God's Hope brings life,  
When it's **hard to reconcile** the happy songs and cheerful décor  
With the reality that **life is a mess**.

**Jesus knows our struggle.**  
And He knows **how much we need HOPE**  
As we prepare for Christmas.

**So God's hope brings life--**  
And it **helps us follow Jesus!**  
It reminds us what Christmas is all about.  
It's not about the gifts, the décor, the gatherings, it really is about **finding Christ**.

And it's **HOPE** that **empowers** us  
to do what we've been asked to do before the end of time—  
to feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger, and visit the sick or the prisoner,  
like Jesus urges us in **Matthew 25!**

I once read that we are called to live lives of faith,  
**ACTIVE waiting in the meantime,**  
**because of the One who holds us in the END time.**  
Wesley D. Avram, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 1, pg. 22.

As we wait for Christ—it's not idle waiting.  
It's **preparation, and expectation.**  
It's an **active waiting**---looking for Jesus in our midst.

One of my all-time favorite '**be ready**' stories is about Robby Robins,  
an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war.  
After his 300th mission, he was surprised to be given permission to immediately  
pull his crew together and fly his plane home.  
They flew to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania.

They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage that read:

***"Welcome Home Dad!"***

***How did they know?***

No one had called, and the crew themselves hadn't expected to leave so quickly. Robins says, "When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, 'Daddy!' And his wife Susan came running down the hall—she looked terrific—hair fixed, make-up on, in a crisp yellow dress.

'How did you know?' I asked.

'I didn't,' she answered through tears of joy.

'Once we knew the war was over, ***we knew you'd be home one of these days.***

We knew you'd try to surprise us, ***so we were just READY EVERY DAY"***

Lee Eclov, in the sermon "Heaven," PreachingToday.com

That's us, friends.

We know ***Jesus is here.***

And we know ***He's coming again*** to make all things right.

So, we should ***get ready.***

That is the ***Good News of the Gospel for Advent:***

***Let's get ready—to find Jesus this Christmas,***

Because He is our ***HOPE.***

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.