

December 2, 2018

Luke 21: 25-28

Rev. Larry C. Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“There Will Be Signs”

It seemed to be a common feeling this year, how quickly the holiday season came upon us. More than once I said or heard others say, “I can’t believe it’s Thanksgiving. I’m not ready for this but here it comes.” Of course, Thanksgiving is but a distant memory by now. On the calendar it’s December and in the Church it’s the first Sunday of Advent, and whether we are ready for it or not, here it comes. There is a part of us that wants to avoid it. I’m talking about the countdown to the big day. There’s a part of us that wants to stay above it all and we come at it with a spiritual protest of sorts. We don’t need to be lectured about the deeper truth. We know it already. We know the season is about much more than deadlines and lists. We know that something deeper is calling us in these days, but we still get pulled into the fray. Christmas is coming and there’s nothing we can do about it...Actually, strike that last statement...Christmas is coming and there’s much we can do, much we should do, much we can’t help but do when we intentionally choose to respond to what God is doing in our lives. This is the truth we know so well. The deeper meaning of Advent and Christmas isn’t about what’s on our “to do” lists. This holy season is about what God can do. Therefore, we’re not in the stores this morning. We’re not shopping online, at least not right now. We’re here, worshipping together and turning our hearts toward Jesus. What we are doing on this First Sunday of Advent is listening and watching for what God is doing. And so, this morning we slow it down. We take a collective breath. We light one candle. We break a loaf of bread. We sing. We pray. Christmas is coming. Christ is coming. “Come, Lord Jesus, come.” This is our deepest prayer. Come, Lord Jesus, and enter our lives once more.

It’s obvious the gospel reading for this morning doesn’t sound like a Christmas passage. In Luke’s 21st chapter Jesus is well into his earthly ministry. His followers have gathered around him and his reputation is well established as a man of God. We turn to the serious words of the adult Jesus because they speak to our experience in this season. The reason Jesus was born and the reason he took on the mission to connect to the lives of people was to make it possible for them and us to know God. The disciples asked him, “When will all of this happen? When is God going to show up and set everything straight?” Jesus said there are signs everywhere. “The sun is a sign and the moon is a sign and the stars and all of the things happening in the world, these are the sign,” Jesus said. Notice how Jesus shifts the focus. His followers wanted to know when it would happen but Jesus shifted them away from a date and time on a calendar. You can’t schedule the activity of God. You can’t make an appointment to be ready for what God is going to do. “The signs,” Jesus said, “are everywhere and they are now.” What this says to us is how everything that happens in the world and every moment in our lives is a time to encounter God. Let me say it another way. Christ continually enters our lives. The question in the season of Advent is whether or not we are paying attention. Like the disciples we want to ask, “Where should we look? How will we know when it will happen?” Jesus says to us, “Look at the signs in your life. Look at our world. Look at one another. Where there is joy or worry, God is about to show up. Wherever you are anxious or confident about your decision making, God is on the way. Wherever we are seeking or searching or struggling, God is near.” I know we have our eyes on the calendar and are very aware of the date and time, but what God is doing transcends all of that. The time is now and the time is always. In the moments and events of our lives God sends Christ to re-establish residence in our hearts. Advent is the time to expect this and to be ready.

This morning we have the blessing of a church member and friend sharing a faith story of when God became especially real to him. Alan Shore is a member of our church staff. His job is to care for our building, fixing things when they are broken and taking care of the many components of our facility that require attention. I’d like you to know that Alan is not only good at his job, he is a man of faith with a servant’s heart. It’s that side of Alan I invite you to know today. So, join me in extending our support to Alan as he comes to share a time in his life when Christ came in an unexpected way.

[What follows is a paraphrase of Alan Shore’s faith sharing with our congregation.]

Sometimes we have things in our lives that cause division and tension with others. We lose sight of the one thing *that is important. We claim to be children of God, but sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we need a reminder that as children of God, there is only one important thing. I got a reminder of this a few years ago on Christmas Eve. It was before we had this sanctuary, so you wanted to get here early to get a seat and visit with friends. I saw a good friend standing across the Fellowship Hall chatting with a young man I didn’t know. As I headed over to say “Hi”, the young man looked up. He was covered in facial piercings. Boy, he looked different. Maybe I won’t go over there. A bit later, I was near a young couple who were having an affair. Well, I don’t want to get into that. So, I’ll just move on.*

*Just before service started, I saw an acquaintance. There wasn't any animosity between us, we just didn't see eye to eye on anything. I think I'll just find my seat.*

*The service was a typical Christmas Eve service, carols, wise men, shepherds, angels, peace on earth, falalala. I confess I was probably thinking about that night's dinner, opening presents, you know the Christmas Stuff.*

*My family had been asked to serve communion for that service, so my son and I took our station and then I saw that God had a sense of humor. In my line was the young couple who didn't live like me. And you know what I told them? I told them "this is the blood of Christ, shed for you." Then the acquaintance that didn't think like me came through, I told him "this is the blood of Christ, shed for you". And yes, the man that didn't look like me came through our line, and I told him "this is the blood of Christ, shed for you".*

*Ok, I was feeling scolded, realizing what a poor example I had been. That's when I turned to my son and he said to me, "the body and blood of Christ, shed for you."*

*There will always be people that don't act, think or look like us, always something that can divide us. But as children of God, we are all the same, and we should hold our heads high.*

[The preaching continues.]

"Show us a sign," they said to Jesus. Jesus said. "The signs are everywhere." As Alan's experience through holy communion reminds us, no matter who we are and no matter what is happening Christ is present and God is known. So many of us will be busy in the weeks ahead creating moments and experiences for one another, all with the hope of making Christmas special. This is what we do and there's a lot that is beautiful in what we do this time of year. But in it all and through it all, lift up your head and expect Christ to come. This is what God is doing and this is how God will make Christmas happen again for us this year.