

Luke 21:25–36  
Populus Zion (Advent II)  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
December 4, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Last week, on the first Sunday of Advent, we addressed how our LORD Jesus Christ comes to us in humility: 2,000 years ago as a humble baby in Bethlehem, and today in humility in the Word of God and in the Sacraments. This morning, on the second Sunday of Advent, we focus on how our LORD will come to us with power and great glory on the Last Day. On that day, Jesus will descend from Heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1 Thess 4:16). Then all the dead will be raised. Many will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will enter into eternal life (Matt 25:46). The great day of the LORD is near (Zeph 1), near and hastening fast. Yet for those of us in Christ the day of the LORD is a day of joy and celebration, a day to look forward to with anticipation. This morning we consider the signs of the times and how we ought to order our lives in light of our Lord's imminent return.

Every season has its own signs of arrival. You know winter is approaching when the days get shorter and colder. You know it's the Advent season when Christmas markets go up, you hear Christmas music on the radio, and start seeing Christmas lights around town. And then the days get longer, the temperature warms, the trees begin budding and you know that spring and summer are around the corner. That's the sign Jesus uses. As the trees begin budding and you know summer is near, so, too, are there signs showing us that God's Kingdom is near.

Many Christians are mistakenly waiting for dramatic signs pointing to the end of the world. The signs are indeed dramatic, but we need to realize that all the signs have already come to pass. There's nothing else to wait for. Our LORD could return at any time. In the Gospel text appointed for today, Jesus speaks of signs in the heavens and signs on the earth, signs that are occurring on a regular basis. Jesus says: "there will be signs in sun and moon and stars." From the beginning, God created the heavenly bodies to serve as signs (Gen 1:14), but signs of what?

When weird things happen in the heavens, people on earth take notice. If you've ever experienced a total solar eclipse, you know what I mean. All of a sudden, a bright, sunshiny day looks like dusk and the sun appears like a fiery ring. It doesn't last long, but you can come away with a sense that the earth is quite small; one more object moving about outer space. It's no wonder nearly all ancient cultures considered a solar eclipse to be a bad omen, a prediction of punishment. Lunar eclipses are also awe-inspiring. When the earth's shadow is cast over the moon, turning it red, we are reminded that all things, no matter how big, are subject to change and decay. And then we consider the stars and other heavenly bodies. Stars much bigger than our sun run out of energy and die. Comets come and go. Asteroids plow into other planets. We look to the heavens, the work of God's fingers, and we ask the LORD: "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps 8). We are so miniscule compared to God's entire creation.

Those are signs in the heavens. And then Jesus points to signs of the End that take place on earth. There is the distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves. Any hurricane or tsunami becomes a picture of the destruction that will come upon the earth when Christ returns for judgment. We are reminded that the world once destroyed by a flood "is now stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the

ungodly” (2 Pet 3:7). People are literally scared out of their minds with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world. The powers of the heavens are shaken, and the earth’s footings aren’t much better. Everything in creation points to a last day.

Some might counter that now we have scientific explanations for eclipses, hurricanes, tsunamis, and whatever else occurs in nature, so we don’t need to see destructive events as omens. Yes, there very well might be a clearer understanding now than before about how these things happen. But that does not diminish how God uses his fallen creation as a sign of something to come. Take the rainbow, for example. We know that rainbows occur when light passes through water droplets in the atmosphere. Science can explain the details of *how* something happens, but that does not take away God’s purposes in nature. The rainbow means the same things today as it did in Noah’s Day: God will never again destroy the entire earth with a flood. How the sign is formed does not take away from the fact that it is a sign from God. In the same way, we know that eclipses occur when the moon passes in front of the sun or the earth’s shadow covers the moon. We know that tectonic shifts lead to earthquakes and tsunamis. But just because we can explain the natural causes of something does not diminish the fact that God also uses these natural events as signs pointing to the end of the world.

The signs have been fulfilled. And then all of a sudden the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory. Jesus will return like a thief in the night, when most of the world is least expecting it. People will be eating, drinking, and getting married, thinking the world will continue as it always has, just life as usual. And suddenly the Master returns. Then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done in it will be exposed. The host of heaven will rot away,

and the skies will roll up like a scroll (Is 34:4). Then the books will be opened for evidence to judge the living and the dead (Rev 20:12).

Make no mistake, all the signs Jesus speaks of are taking place—signs in the heavens and signs on the earth. We see all the signs of the End fulfilled as creation groans to be set free from its bondage to the corruption of sin. Our LORD could return at any moment because the End Times began a long time ago. For the unbelieving world, those who do not believe these signs, the Last Day will be a day like any other day, a day of wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness (Zeph). Yet Jesus tells us Christians: “when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” As Christians we rejoice in Christ’s return. In courage we raise our heads because our redemption is drawing near. Jesus already redeemed us at the cross by dying for our sins, to buy us back from sin, death, and the Devil. And when Christ returns, the eternal life we begin to enjoy now will come in its fullness. Then we will experience the full effects of redemption for ourselves and for all creation in the new heavens and the new earth.

With this view towards the Last Day, our Lord then tells us how to live right now: “watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.” Dissipation means overindulgence in sensual pleasures. So don’t spend your days striving for food, drink, and living it up. The unbelieving world says: “Let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.” The Christian says: “Let us redeem the time because the days are evil.” The unbeliever is worried about what he will eat and what he will drink and what he will wear, only considering the things of this earthly life. Of course, everything in creation is a gift and we enjoy the things God has given to us, in moderation. Unbelievers live for today because they mistakenly believe this world is all

there is. And so the end will come upon them seemingly out of nowhere and as a surprise, like an animal getting caught in a trap. But Christians order their lives in light of the age to come, preparing not just for this life but for eternity.

Jesus tells us to stay awake at all times, praying that we might have strength to escape all these things and to stand before the Son of Man. Watch and pray, especially during this season of Advent. Consider the signs of the End and how everything has already been fulfilled. Christ could return at any moment and then you must stand before His judgment seat. Pray that the pleasures and cares of this world would not blind you to eternity. Pray that the LORD would preserve you in the faith, that you would be judged not according to what you have done but according to the righteousness of Jesus. Don't use the time God has given you on earth worrying about earthly things. We have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Pet 1:19). Heaven and earth are passing away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever and He is coming soon. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.