

“Shaken Foundation”

December 2, 2018

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Luke 21: 25-28,34-36

In case you hadn't noticed, today is the first Sunday in Advent. Advent consists of the 4 Sundays before Christmas and is marked as a season to prepare for God's coming to earth. It is preparing for Christmas and the celebration of Jesus' birth, but Christianity is not a faith that simply looks backwards and remembers what God has done in the past; Christianity looks to the present as Jesus comes to us anew whenever we open ourselves to Him, and it looks forward to what God is doing and has promised us He will do in the future. Advent is a time to remember God coming to earth in little baby Jesus, God coming to be born in us through the Holy Spirit, and a time of preparation for Jesus to return. That return will not as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, but as verse 27 says, "in the clouds with power and great glory" as Christ the king, the ruler, the lone authority to reign on earth forever and ever.

Our Scripture lesson focuses on Christ's future return. Earlier in the chapter, the disciples asked Jesus for signs of when His coming Kingdom would become a reality. Jesus responded with prophecy of wars and earthquakes, famines and plagues, of persecution and betrayal. In this morning's lesson He speaks of signs in the sun, moon and stars as well as in seas and roaring waves. It seems every generation has seen this prophecy come true. Just this week we heard a very ominous climate change report from the president's administration about the effects of increased temperatures, polar ice melt, and rising sea levels. That could easily be interpreted as a sign from the sun, the seas and the roaring waves, and as verse 26 says, it is causing "men to faint with fear of what is coming to the world." From the Apostle Paul to today, every generation has seen Jesus' prophetic signs fulfilled and knew Jesus's return was eminent, yet every generation has seen the sun rise and the world continue on like it always has.

But when I read passages like the 21st chapter of Luke, I cannot help but believe they are true because I see glimpses every day. I know the prophecies and signs are about Christ's return to the world, but where I see it every day is on a personal level. When the solid ground on which individuals stand suddenly begins to shake: when the job they would have forever is gone, when their own health or the health of a loved one starts to decline, when they or their spouse have an affair, when their beloved science and technology fulfills their every need yet they are restless, hungry for something, and more of the same is not helping, when they lose faith in their government and humanity's goodness, when their very foundation is shaken and they find themselves at war with the world around them and all the signs in the sun, moon and stars bring nothing but fear, when twin towers burn to the ground, wild fires burn out of control, and tsunamis wash away what we thought was permanent, when every tragedy Jesus says will happen to the world happens to them personally as well as all around them, when everything they thought was real and true and forever is gone; then and only then do they turn to God and allow the hope of Jesus to enter their world.

I think the reason all the prophecies are so dark and violent and destructive is because for way too many of us, we need to be shaken in order to turn to God. For when we stay in school, work

hard, keep our word, fulfill our promises and obligations, and our life is good; we develop faith, but it is not faith in God. It is faith in ourselves, faith in the system, faith in our abilities. For way too many of us, especially in a place like Rochester, Indiana where drastic, sudden change is not a part of our cultural makeup, the biggest obstacle to genuine faith in God through Jesus Christ is faith in ourselves, our smarts, our abilities, and our connections. I want to call it self-faith.

I think dealing with that self-faith is what the second half of our reading means when it talks about keeping watch and being ready for Jesus' return. You see, you cannot put a light in a pumpkin that is still full of itself. Keeping watch and being ready means cleaning out room for God's light within us so God doesn't have to carve out the space. Being ready means not just taking Jesus as Savior, but Lord – as in boss, head honcho, master. When Jesus says jump, we don't ask how high, we just start jumping as high as we can. When Jesus says love, we don't ask who, we just start reaching out with loving acts to everyone from ourselves to our family to our friends to complete strangers at Walmart to the hungry and lost to people around the world we will never meet. When Jesus says forgive, we don't say, "but you don't understand how much he hurt me". Jesus forgave those who whipped Him, beat Him and hung Him on a cross to die. He does understand how much that person hurt you, and He says forgive. When Jesus says trust me, I am the way; we don't say "but looking out for myself first has been working well for me." We trust and pour ourselves out physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially for the sake of others. We trust giving life is how we receive life. It is about being ready, and being ready means not just taking Jesus as Savior, but Lord. It means treating our body like the temple of the Holy Spirit that it is – not only in what we put in it physically and mentally, but in how we allow others and ourselves to use it. Taking Jesus as Lord means loving the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself all the time. We don't get to pigeon hole our lives. You know, do what your boss says and live by work standards of right and wrong while at work, then live by your friends' moral and ethical standards when you are out playing with them, then play another role when you get home, and another role at church on Sunday. No, Jesus as Lord means loving God and neighbor 24/7. Being ready means the Great Commission. It is scary to talk about your faith and it is scary to invite someone to Jesus and to church, but bringing someone to Jesus is the greatest gift you could ever give them. It is the only thing in this world that lasts beyond this world. Eternity is for real, and self-faith is not going to get them there. Being ready means living compassionate justice – not what is fair, but what is right.

Verse 35 assures us that stuff is coming to each and every one of us that will shake the very foundation of where we stand, and unless we are ready and that foundation is Jesus, the shaking will cause it to crumble beneath our feet and all the smarts, abilities, and relationships we trusted in will leave us flailing about, lunging for something to push off of or hold onto. But there are witnesses in this very room that can tell you from firsthand experience: when your parent or spouse dies, when you lose your job, when the doctor says you have cancer, when your health, your financial stability, your loved ones fail you; standing on Jesus is hope and life. He is the unshakable foundation.

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