

Sermon First Sunday of Advent, December 1, 2024, Luke 21: 25-36
Emmanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pa.,
Rev. Timothy W. Sadler

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

I think there are many people in the church who don't fully understand the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ. Books have been written about it: it's all through our liturgy, but most of the time, we don't stop and think about what it means.

When someone we love dies, most of us would say our loved one is living with God in heaven and has been reunited with those who went before them. Yet the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ and the final resurrection teaches that when we die, we are totally non-existent.

We go into nothingness until that last day when we will all be resurrected into life once again, at the Second coming of Christ. So, in the meantime, there's no heaven for us or continuing life in any form. We are totally gone.

From the time humans started talking about God, we have struggled to put Divine Mystery into words, and no matter what we say, there's always more. That doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about God, but only...

that we realize any concept we have about God, is going to be very limited, and so therefore should always be opened to being transformed.

We look at the life of Christ to help us understand God. But Jesus was also limited by human language, and by the time and culture into which He was born. Many of the things we talk about now, like quantum physics and multi-dimensional universes, Jesus in human form would not have known about, and even if He had and tried to talk about them, His listeners wouldn't have understood.

Jesus was limited because He was in a human body. Jesus admitted there were things He didn't know. We say Jesus was omniscient—all knowing—and we in Western culture automatically go to head knowledge.

We think being omniscient means having all the facts and data.

When we talk of Jesus being omniscient, we mean Jesus had full knowledge of God—not head knowledge, but heart, mind and soul knowledge: Jesus had a full relationship with God, was fully aware of God's presence.

When I first came out of seminary, I taught about the Second coming, about the final resurrection, and about everyone being dead—out of existence—until that time. But theology should never be done in a vacuum. It should never be a set of doctrines or ideas that are uninformed by life.

This happens when the church is so afraid of people taking personal experiences and running wild with their faith, that the church moves to the other extreme of doing theology separated from the lessons and experiences of life.

Over the years as I became more familiar with death, and experienced it with the people in the parish, I began to question the teaching of a resurrection in the future. I came to realize that seeing the resurrection in the future...

was what we call linear thinking: the kind of thinking we do in chronos time, chronological time: one-minute follows another, one hour follows another hour, and so on. In chronos time we talk of past, present and future.

But God exists outside of time. Time is something we experience here on earth but won't in eternity. Here we age, here we grow old; but we won't in eternity. Everything in eternity exists in God's eternal now.

So, when it comes to Divine mystery, we can't use chronos time; it simply doesn't apply. When we enter Divine mystery we begin to talk in terms of Kairos time: this means the fullness of time, when time has depth and significance and purpose; it means the right time.

When I became a hospice chaplain and later as a chaplain concentrating in Palliative Care, what I experienced with the dying further solidified my belief that what we envision as a future event, is already a reality in God's eternal now. For me, that came to mean when we die, we are immediately resurrected to new life with God.

There's a term used in dying called "nearing death awareness." This isn't the same as a near death experience where people die and come back. Nearing death awareness has to do with the experiences people have when they are approaching death more slowly. It has to do with a growing awareness of God's eternal now.

I remember visiting a patient at the Gesinger Medical Center who had just transitioned from palliative care to hospice. He was still very much with it mentally. He looked at me as I sat down to talk with him and said, "you are going to think I'm crazy." I told him I would not think that of him.

He went on to tell me that just before I came into the room he had been visited by his wife. The only thing was she had died several years ago. I assured him he wasn't crazy. I shared with him that I believe a visit like that is a gift from our gracious God—that in fact his wife was preparing him so he wouldn't be afraid.

She was assuring him that life goes on.

I began to look at my theology through encounters such as these, and in near death ministries, there are many—books have been written about them. And nearing death awareness has nothing to do with drugs or the disease process.

It is the reality of God's eternal now penetrating time, and bringing the dying and all those around them, a word of amazing grace and hope.

So, for me, when I celebrate Advent and Christ's amazing power to make all things new, I celebrate a reality that already exists outside of time.

However it is we choose to celebrate Advent, whatever we believe about the Second Coming and final resurrection, we can be certain that whatever is needed for new life and hope, God will do. This is a promise that will never change.

Let us pray:

God of all life, our past, present, and future belong to you. Let the grace of your presence with us calm any worries about the future. However you bring new life, it will be right and good. We are blessed to be your people.

AMEN.

Children / Young at heart Story

Theme

We look forward to Jesus' return.

Object

Christmas decorations

Scripture

Luke 21:25-36

Christmas is coming soon. It's easy to tell. We see the signs all around us. (Point to Christmas decorations.) What signs have you seen? (Allow kids to answer.) We see Christmas decorations on houses; we hear Christmas songs on the radio; we see commercials on TV, and more. If we didn't have all of these things to remind us, how could we tell that Christmas is coming? (Pause for responses.)

Two thousand years ago, there was no TV or radio announcing that a child would be born and that He would be the Savior of the world. When Jesus was born, very few people even knew about it. But it was an event that God had promised, and it was foretold by prophets many years before. Many people had been looking forward to the coming of the Savior, but they didn't know exactly when He was coming.

We're entering the season of Advent. *Advent* means "the coming of something very important." It is a period of time when we look forward to the celebration of Jesus' birth at Christmas--and we also look forward to Jesus' return.

Jesus promised to come again, and we look forward to it, just as people 2,000 years ago looked forward to the Savior being born. No one knows exactly when Jesus will come back. It isn't marked on the calendar, but we're watching and waiting, expectantly.

As we prepare to celebrate the birthday of our Savior, let's also be sure we prepare for His exciting return.

Dear God, we thank You for this special time of year and its important meaning to us. We praise You for keeping your promise to send a Savior who will come back again. In Jesus' name, amen.

Sermons4Kids 2024