

First Sunday of Advent, December 2, 2018, Liturgical Year "C"

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 21:25-33

"Are You Ready?"

"Happy New Year!" Today is the first Sunday of Advent and we begin a new liturgical church year – moving from year B to year C in the Anglican Church in North America Sunday Lectionary, and from year 2 to year 1 in the Daily Lectionary. We are beginning a season of preparation – the season of Advent. The Advent wreath is lit and I hope will sit at many dinner tables today as people light their own Advent wreaths; it is a great time of year and a great time of anticipation.

Speaking of anticipation – have you ever gotten a song stuck in your head and you can't figure out why? It follows you and won't let go. You keep hearing the melody over and over again in your head. There is a song that I have played on Contemporary Christian Gold – on 979WDMG as a ministry of St. Andrew's – but I played for years in New York and Jacksonville, FL. This song came out in 1970 – it was a great tune – by a band called Pacific Gas and Electric. It got a lot of the regular radio airplay. The funny thing is – not everybody caught the meaning of the words – or even paid attention to them. Many people could be found singing along to:

"Are you ready to sit by His throne?

Are you ready not to be alone?

Somebody's coming to take you home

And if you're ready then He'll carry you home."

Did you know it was about the second coming of Jesus? Probably not.

Now remember, this was played all over regular - secular radio! Come to think of it – there was no Christian Music Radio in 1970! There was even songs like 'Spirit in the Sky' by Norman Greenbaum, and 'Put Your Hand in the Hand' by a group called Ocean. They are all about Jesus Christ. These were huge hit songs being played on radios all over the world – and the meanings were not being heard – except by a few – of the love and the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In today's Holy Gospel Jesus tells us that there will be signs – and nations will be confused! Are you ready; to sit by His throne? He tells us that we can have hope in the midst of difficult times. The signs are all around us: wars, uncertain financial times, natural disasters, people seriously worried by the events that are happening right around them, or not too far away from them. Some people often feel that they have no control in their lives, no way to steer their ship out off of the sandbar and into the safety of the deep harbor. I can tell you that if I did not have Jesus in my life when my doctor told me that I needed to continue to wear this boot on my foot, that is fractures, until January 3rd, after all I brought the other shoe with em, I was ready to change, but he told me it was not healing the way he wants, I would have been crushed! Instead, I am not going to worry about what I cannot control. I just give it to the world and say I know you are going to heal it. Some people just absolutely give up hope. Yes, there are signs around us, but they don't need to make us afraid. The signs lead, not to the end, but to the beginning. The

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signs lead, not to destruction, but to our complete wholeness. God's salvation is at hand! We are called to stand firm in the Lord!

You know – there are many signs all around us – and a lot of them can be confusing. So, I decided to examine some of the actual signs outside many churches – tell folks what is going on inside. I think you will find these amusing and even eye opening. Listen to these:

- Where will you be sitting in eternity? Smoking or Non-smoking?
- Try Jesus – if you don't like Him- the devil will always take you back!
- The wages of sin is death – repent before pay day!
- Don't let your worries kill you – let the church help!
- If God is your co-pilot – SWITCH SEATS!
- Prevent truth decay – brush up on your Bible!
- We use duct tape to fix everything – God used 3 nails.
- Be fishers of men: you catch them – He will clean them!
- Get out of Facebook and get into MYBOOK – love, God.

Each one of these signs is open to its own interpretation; and each one needs its own investigation to find out the truth behind each sign.

The Bible is full of signs pointing to Our Lord's coming again and how these signs will be treated by the world. Jesus warned about wars, diseases, famines, and earthquakes as well as an increase of religious cults and false teachers in Matthew 24. He also told us how we would be seen by others: "*you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*" (Matthew 24:9) The Apostle Paul warns us in his second letter to Timothy: "*People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.*" (2 Timothy 3:2-4) He continues later in that same letter: "*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.*" (2 Timothy 4:3-4) All we have to do is look at the fine job that we have done with the birth of Jesus – and the myths that have become more important to the world than the simple babe in the manger! Trees and Santa's and sleighs! The moral LAW – the Ten Commandments: – how we are to act toward God and how we are to act towards others – is being totally ignored – and is in some cases banned from display! The Apostle Peter warns in 2 Peter: "*In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised?'*" (2 Peter 3:3-4) I could go on and on. The signs are everywhere!

And isn't it true that Jesus tells us very plainly that we are to expect incredible signs? In today's Holy Gospel from Luke 21 Jesus says: "*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*" (Luke 21:28) Don't be

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scared – be hopeful! We are called to have hope instead of fear. The signs that are happening around us are not supposed to make us lose heart, but to be strengthened in our walk of faith. Right in the midst of the heavens and earth being shaken, we can rejoice in the Lord. We can endure these times, as unpleasant and downright brutal as they may be, because we have a God who promises that He will see us through it all. We have a God who will not abandon us in the midst of the roaring of the sea, but will be coming with “*power and great glory.*” (Luke 21:27) If we suffer in these times, remember, we do not suffer them alone. We can stand firm in the midst of the signs, because our salvation is at hand – our redemption is drawing near! Jesus said, “*I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age.*” (Matthew 28:20) Right after today’s Gospel Jesus continues to describe His coming again. In His description Jesus encourages us, “*Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.*” (Luke 21:36) I don’t know about you but I am not afraid of His coming again, I am looking forward to it. What did Jesus say to be saved? “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him – shall not perish but have eternal life.*” Is it that easy? The answer is YES. Believe in Him as Lord – next problem?

Advent is the season of hope, and the season of repentance. If you notice – the colors of our vestments and the veil and burse on the altar have changed for the season of Advent. Last week we wore white for Christ the King Sunday, and the previous weeks we wore green for the season of Pentecost. We will be wearing purple for the next four weeks as we are preparing the way of the Lord – filled with hope, expectation, anticipation and repentance, all the while we will look forward to changing to white on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day – celebrating the birth of our Lord, Jesus. We need to get ready! We need to start right now – for when Jesus comes again – it will be “ready or not!”

In the chaos of this world; in the tumult of life; in the brokenness that we all feel, we need to remember that there is hope. There is hope because Jesus is coming; we remember His coming as a babe in the manger to redeem this world. We look forward to His coming again at the end of time to finish His act of redemption. Today’s Old Testament lesson from the Prophet Zechariah also should fill believers with encouragement – as the promise of the Messiah’s coming – His return to the Mount of Olives - from where He ascended to the Father in Acts chapter 1. The mountain will split in two and water will rush to the east and to the west. It will be magnificent, and there will not be a worry about it being too cloudy or not enough sun. Jesus will be our light. His brightness will give us all the light we need – and there will be no night – as living waters will flow. He will reign as King on that day; King over all the earth. And so we have nothing to fear – for we know Him! We should be looking forward to that day – with great anticipation.

What an awesome prayer the Apostle Paul gave to us that we heard this morning in our New Testament lesson from 1 Thessalonians 3, filled with hope and encouragement: “*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the*

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Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones."

(1 Thessalonians 3:11-13)