

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-40

“Real Hope – The King is Coming”

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. There is a lot more going on here than meets the eye. It is the first Sunday of the new church year. The Lectionary is where we get our readings from on a three-year rotation and last Sunday was the last Sunday of that church year – Christ the King Sunday in year A. Now that we have turned that corner – we are now in Year B. Next year on the First Sunday of Advent we would be in Year C. We are to be preparing – because the King is coming! Advent is a season of preparation, as you can see we have started and are not done by any means, there is a lot more coming. It is about anticipating, preparing and hoping for the coming of the King – Jesus Christ, who, alone, saves us from everything that is trying to destroy us. Advent is a time in which we are searching for hope - or at least a break from the fear that tries to surround and overwhelm our daily lives. In light of that anticipation – it would be good for us to hold onto these words from our first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah calling out to God: “*Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.*” (Isaiah 64:1).” To rend means to tear open! Sometimes you read of the priest or king who rends his garments – or ripped them open – because he was in some way ‘struck.’ Well we are asking God to ‘rend the heavens,’ open the heavens and come down. As an answer to that prayer, Jesus stepped into this world when He was born of Mary, to save us – and He is coming again – to reign forever!

We read in today's Gospel of Mark – Our Lord's description of the difficulties and fearful events that are facing the world and we know some of the apprehension that comes along with those signs - and we have got to look to our only source of hope that we can put our trust in. His Name is Jesus, and He offers these words filled with hope and truth in Mark 13:31 “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.*” These words are faithful and true, and they give us hope and direction for whatever lies ahead. Jesus' words tell us that His word, the Word of God, is eternal, trustworthy and true – and that we need to be about spreading and delivering His Word to the world. That is an essential part of our preparation! We must be about getting into and staying in the Word of God. Here is the tough part: not once a week in church, or once a week if you come Wednesday nights, but every day! That doesn't mean that you have to be opening up and pouring after chapter after chapter on a daily basis, it could be five minutes! Open His Word and learn from Him! Jesus said “*Come to Me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke and learn from Me... and you will find rest for your soul for I am meek and humble of heart.*” (Matthew 11:28-29) Getting into and staying into God's Holy Word on a daily basis is hard – it is very hard, but it is a process.

In Mark, chapter 4 - Jesus' main message there is for us to “*Listen.*” Jesus says: “*Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.*” Ironically enough, Jesus is surrounded by people who are unwilling to listen; people who are unwilling to hear what He is really saying. They refuse to hear the actual voice of God speaking of a new way of living, a purpose for creation that is not based upon power, intimidation and violence. To truly “listen” is to listen through the ears of

Jesus Christ, through His heart, and to hear the cries of those in need and hear that true power comes in doing service for others. How many of us have prayed to be able to hear with Jesus' ears? Just a few minutes ago I asked for God to open our eyes, our ears, our hearts and our minds – and God wants to do just that.

Today's Gospel reading is part of a lesson which is often called Jesus' "Olivet discourse." The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke record accounts of Jesus' teaching on the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem. On the Mount is the Garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus gave this very important lesson on the week before He died; before He was arrested and put on the cross. In this lesson from Mark, chapter 13, Jesus' primary message is for His followers to "Watch – to stand guard." His message stresses the need for us to open our eyes and pray that God would allow you to have not only the eyes of Jesus Christ to see the world as it really is; but the ears of Jesus Christ as well, to see the events of the world as Jesus sees them. During a time of terror, and we have had more terror in the last 15 years, we must recognize that God has not left the building, God is there. I really don't like it when on 9/11 people asked 'where was God? He was holding each and every person who was affected, and their loved ones. We cannot put God in a box and think that He can only be one place at a time. He is there - He is not only in control, but He has a plan to help us through it. We also need to have eyes to recognize evil for what it is. Evil, the absence of good, is from the enemy and it is nothing more than a meaningless, empty promise. Meaning and purpose to life can only be found in the One who created the world; the One who promises to save all those who look to Him at all times, but especially in times of terror, distress and heartache – and to trust totally in Him.

In Mark 13:24-25, Jesus' words begin with what many perceive to be foreboding and terror. He says: *"But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."* Wow, these are frightening events, but they may very well seem insignificant in light of the terror that faces the world today.

- We have seen the terror that has crept onto our safe homeland.
- We live daily with the prospect of war with North Korea, and Iran.
- Every week we hear of another terrorist plot, or a young person willing to die for a cause killing everyone around.
- We find out about child predators and people who live to instill fear and pain on others simply for their own pleasure.
- We know the terror that lives on our own streets - where we fear walking alone after dark.
- We know the terrors of diseases that strike despite amazing advances in medicine, in spite of the best efforts of people to keep healthy.
- We know terror in a culture that is proving to be nothing but toxic to our children.

No, we don't need images of darkened skies and falling stars to know terror – we are living in the middle of it!

But in answer to this terror, Jesus warns us to “*Be on guard! Be alert!*” Jesus is telling us to not be held hostage; seeing things as the forces of evil want you to see.” Watch! Keep alert!

Only God gives life meaning – and that gives me great hope. Life is not defined by the fear or the threat from the enemy - who wants to scare the dickens out of us, to throw us off track or even to try to control us. We need to recognize evil for what it is, and recognize that God is with us and that He is at work even in the midst of all the evil. I need to remind you once again - that each one of us should be asking God to give us eyes to see as He does; asking to see people and things as He does. We need to see in a new way; to keep awake and aware to God’s way of seeing.

Jesus reminds us that a time is coming, that none of us knows, in which the King is coming – and we have got to be ready, we have got to prepare. We need to broaden our vision. It’s time to stop looking over our shoulders for those who threaten us and instead for us to see the broken ones

- who need God;
- who need His healing and mercy;
- who need the comfort of His Word, His mercy and His love.

The cold hard reality of it is that each and every person needs to have God in their life. We have been created to know, love and worship God. When someone does not know God - they are left with a large “black hole” in their life – and because of that - many seek to wreak havoc in the lives of others.

Knowing God, serving Him and worshipping Him, we can make a difference by being an example to others in the way we live – and let Christ’s light shine in us – by inviting others to experience God’s Word in action! That does not mean that I am giving you an assignment to go and stand on a street corner with a Bible – but you might want to share with other people – people that you love, family, friends – about what God has done in your life. Each one of you has a story to tell of God working in your life – I know – I have heard it – I have seen it! We need to tell it to others.

God did step into history – in the person of His Blessed Son, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but the people didn’t recognize the King – instead they ridiculed, rejected, and murdered Him. They hung Him from a cross - BUT – God’s promises cannot be destroyed – Jesus rose from the dead – and is ALIVE today! Remember, God DID promise that His King would reign. When Jesus the King, comes again – His followers will have nothing to fear – but instead to rejoice that He has come to reign over them, and us, and draw them to Himself for all eternity. Jesus said in the Gospel of Mark 13:26 “*At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*” There will be no mistaking this event – none whatsoever! You are going to have to tune to CNN, or Fox News, or MSNBC, or WALB. You are not going to have to worry about it – you will know – just look up. You might ask that if He comes to the

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Mount of Olives – how am I going to see Him in Douglas, GA, or Coffee County? God is God – you are going to see it – trust me. Jesus said so – there will be no mistaking it. What will be fearful to many will be a means for those who know Jesus – to see Him face to face and worship their King – in power in truth and love – and in person! I don't know about you – but I am NOT afraid of that – I look forward to it. His words and promises are true – and you can take that to the bank! Jesus also told us that “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.*” (Mark 13:31) It is in His Words that we can put our trust, draw our hope, and know that He is as good as His promises.

Jesus made it perfectly clear when He told us in John 5:24-27 “*I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.*” The King is coming – and we can be filled with hope at the thought of His coming, and I know that I cannot wait!

We begin this season of Advent, a time of anticipation and hope before a Christmas that is to come; but we also need to recognize it as a time of anticipation for the One who is to come again. All around us we see things that give us false hope and false meaning to our lives, that are not where our hope lies. As followers of Jesus Christ, as believers of Jesus Christ we long for the coming of the One who promises release to the captives, gives sight to the blind. Faith in Him brings hope for you and me in the midst of all that would incite terror in us today.

- The hope for the world is not found in the promises of politicians and world leaders.
- The hope for the world is found in One who came as a vulnerable small child into this world, who knows our fears and terrors and cries with us in the midst of the terror, but also shows us a way through the terror to hope.
- It is Jesus who has the power to destroy the powers that destroy people! He is coming – the King is coming!

“*Be on guard, be alert!*” The Savior of the world is about to return and that gives us great hope! The King is coming!