

First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2021, Liturgical Year “C”

St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 21:25-33

“Ready or Not!”

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 1 to year 2 in the Daily Lectionary. We are beginning a new season of preparation – the season of Advent. Our Advent wreath is now lit and I hope one 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.

In today’s Holy Gospel Jesus tells us that the world will see signs – and nations will be confused! So, are you ready – or not? He tells us that we can have hope in the midst of difficult times. The signs are all around us: wars, uncertain financial times, gas prices going through the roof, natural disasters, people seriously worried by the events that are happening right around them, or not too far away from them. We have been through this terrible thing called Covid. Many people have had this at home, or family members and we pray that if anyone else comes down with this – it would be something that would pass quickly. 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 waters. I can tell you that for me, with everything going on with my esophagus and my voice, and my throat - there might have been times where I could have felt lost. Instead, God has given me a peace, and I am not going to worry about what I cannot control. If this is as good as it going to get from now on – then so be it, and I am going to accept that and I will do as God had asked. As a matter of fact, I just recorded my Saturday Night Show for New York, and my voice is like this – oh well. As I said, I recorded Wednesday’s show for Contemporary Christian Gold. I was good for a month because I was editing up old shows and now my voice sounds like this. That is the way it is. I accept this and know that God has got this. He has given me a peace and I am not going to worry about it. If you cannot control it – why worry about it. I just give it to the Lord and say to Him I know that you are going to heal it. My hope is in Him. Unfortunately, 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! If He comes again, that means we are new in Him. The 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!

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. You have got to listen to this because this is all around us: *“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) In that same letter, Paul

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continues, *“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) For example, just look how the world has changed the way it looks at the birth of Jesus, with the myths becoming more important than focusing on the simple babe in the manger! It has become more about trees, lights, and Santa’s and sleighs! Just look at the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. I remember a time when it was filled with Christmas songs and celebration from beginning to end. Not this year! This year it has gotten away from that and become more about selling Broadway and movies and more. It was not until 11:42 AM when the focus changed to Christmas, but it was in selling greeting cards, TV channels of Christmas shows, and finally then culminated with the arrival of Santa. I am not knocking it – I am simply examining it and seeing how it has changed. I was truly disappointed in how the focus had changed from the season, the holiday – to “want to buy what I am selling?” And then let’s talk about the Ten Commandments which tell us how we are to act toward God (the first 4) and how we are to behave towards others (the last 6). Did you realize that they form the sign of the cross? Society is totally ignoring them, and is in some cases banned from being on 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) Indeed, the signs are everywhere!

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) In other word – FEAR NOT! Don’t be 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. With the heavens and earth being shaken, we can rejoice in the Lord. We can endure these times, as scary and troubling as they might 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 are not suffering them alone. We can stand firm in the midst of these signs because our salvation is at hand – our redemption is drawing near! Hold onto these words that Jesus said, *“I will be with you always, even to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20) How comforting that is! Right after today’s Holy 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, as a matter of fact, I am looking forward to it. Remember how Jesus told us we can 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.”* It does not get any clearer than that!

Advent is the season of hope, and the season of repentance. We wear purple during Advent as we are prepare the way of the Lord – filled with hope, expectation, anticipation, and

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repentance, (repentance means turning away from our behavior and turning back to God) while we look forward to changing to white on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, when all of these candles – the 3 purple and one pink – will all turn to white – and all of the vestments will be white. That is a promise – as we will be celebrating the birth of our Lord, Jesus. We need to get ready!

In spite of the chaos of this world and the brokenness that we all feel, we need to remember that there is hope. There is hope because Jesus is coming! He said it – and you can take that to the bank! We need to remember His coming as a babe in the manger to redeem this world, and 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 – how beautiful - is filled with encouragement, with the promise of the Messiah’s coming and 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 truly be magnificent, and no one will worry about it being too cloudy or there not enough sun. Jesus will be our light. His brightness will give the world all the light we need, and living waters will flow. Jesus will reign as King over all the earth on that day. And so we have nothing to fear – because we know Him! We should be looking forward to that day – with great anticipation.

The Apostle Paul gave us an amazing prayer in 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 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) Jesus is coming – ready or not!