

Jesus is Coming

- [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#)
- [Luke 21:25-36](#)

I read an interview with novelist Louise Erdrich this week. She is writing a ghost story and the interviewer asked her why a ghost story. She replied that she's always wanted to write a ghost story, and went on to say, "when I started working on the book, I realized that everything the world is going through right now is because we live in a haunted age. We're haunted by the legacy of racism, by our overuse of the world's resources and by this invisible, unknowable illness."¹ I think I would add a fourth haunting. We are also haunted by the specter of nuclear disaster. So we are haunted by racism, climate change, covid and nuclear power. That's a lot. You might well think that Jesus was talking about us when he said in this morning's gospel, "People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world." Yet we are not the first people to think that the situation we are in is so intolerable that surely God will have to intervene. Surely now is the time when we "will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory." But we are still waiting.

Today is the first Sunday in the church's year. Advent Sunday. The first of four Sundays as we prepare to celebrate and remember Christ's incarnation. And alongside our preparation for the coming of Christ as a human baby, as kind of a subplot, is our longing for the return of Christ in all his glory to sort out the mess that we humans create. And so our readings today are ones of longing, ones which make us cry once again "O Come, o come Emmanuel".

¹ <https://www.aarp.org/entertainment/books/info-2021/louise-erdrich-interview.html>

Come God and be with us. And this is God's promise, that God will be with us even when the sky is falling. On Tuesday morning, some of us listened to an interview with Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop of South Africa. He was talking about how he managed to stay joyful despite the horrors he has seen and experienced and he said that God is still in charge. But then he laughed and said that many times he has told God, "It would be good if you would make it more obvious that you are in charge."

Look what Jesus tells us to do when people are fainting from fear and foreboding, he says "stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Stand up and raise your heads. People of God this is not a time for us to be faint-hearted. This is a time for us to stand tall and to face the present and the future with confidence. Because God is coming and our redemption is near.

Look at the parable that Jesus tells about the fig tree – and thanks to Lorraine for this insight – he doesn't say look at the fig tree, when all its leaves fall off you know winter is coming, no he says "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near." Summer is coming. This is good news.

What a different mindset Jesus calls us to. When things get so bad that people are fainting from fear and foreboding, when the ghosts are crowding in, rejoice because it means that the reign of God is very near. We live in great times because Christ is here. In the darkness and the gloom, the reign of God is near. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he told us to "Rejoice always." However bad it gets in this world, however much evil seems to overcome beauty, justice and peace, however much we hurt and our loved ones are in pain, God is near and so we can rejoice.

I'm not talking about some inappropriate rejoicing, "Oh praise God there's a new viral mutation!" Not at all. It is appropriate for us to grieve, it is appropriate for us to long for peace and healing and the fulfillment of all the promises of God here and now but at the same time we can rejoice because as Tutu said, God is still in charge. Our longing is for the reign of God to be fully manifest in our midst. Our longing is for Christ to come again. Our faith tells us that the God we know, the God of unconditional love, the God who always has time for us, is still here sustaining us in every moment.

A few chapters before today's reading, in Luke chapter 17, the Pharisees ask Jesus when the reign of God will come and he replies, "The reign of God does not come with your careful observation nor will people say "here it is" or "there it is" because the reign of God is within you." Another paradox. We look for Christ coming in the clouds but the reign of God is already here, within us. God's reign manifests in and through us whenever we choose to live generously, giving and forgiving, not gaining energy from criticism and complaint.

Now Jesus has some pretty serious words for us. He says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

"Be on guard that your hearts are not weighed down." Everything seems to conspire to weigh our hearts down. The news media depend on the awful things to encourage us to read the news, turn on the television. People around us are talking about how awful things are. But we are not

to be weighed down. People of God, the leaves are on the fig tree, summer is on its way, Jesus is coming!

That is our truth. God's words will not pass away. God's promises are true and dependable. God is still in charge. The reign of God is here and now in our hearts and in the beloved community that we create together. Let us not be "weighed down by dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life." It's easy isn't it, to be weighed down by the worries of this life. I certainly get that way. But Jesus tells us that that is a trap.

Just say no. Say no to the cultural norm of worry and despondency. Because the very things that make people faint from fear and foreboding are the things that show us that God's reign is near.

We get to pray "Do not bring us to the time of trial, but deliver us from evil". We get to take action... the reign of God is not a spectator sport. Be alert, Jesus says, and Paul underlines that in the letter to the Thessalonians when he writes, "And may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

As we build the reign of God, as we continue to practice living in God's love and walking in God's path, as we continue to play our part in realizing the reign of God within and around us by our prayers, our actions and our attitudes, so we are building the new world, the new society that God has promised. Let us rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus *is* coming! Let us be holy, guarding against drunkenness, dissipation and despair!

Our hope is in the one who comes in the Name of the Lord! Let us, as
we often do, say together,
Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again.
Alleluia