

Sermon Reading: Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ 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.”

Sermon Theme: Stand Up, Pay Attention, Be Ready—Jesus Will Be Here Soon

Some people really love their countdowns. As the special event they are looking forward to draws closer they love crossing off the days. It gives them something to look forward to. It gives them hope. Christmas is one of those times where many will have a countdown of some sort. A small child wonders how many more sleeps until Christmas hopeful for presents that might come their way. A parent wonders how much time they have during this holiday season hopeful they will get everything done. After a taste of a break with Thanksgiving one might look forward to the next one in a few short weeks hopeful of rest.

When we see the signs that something good is coming soon there is this hope. At this time of year God’s people aren’t just hopeful of Christmas and the celebration of Jesus’ birth. It’s not just about being ready for the next holiday. We look forward to and are hopeful for Jesus’ return. But are you paying attention? When you look at your life and the decisions you make, are you ready? Because Jesus will be here soon.

We know that he is coming soon because Jesus gives us the signs to look for. And from those signs we know the only thing left is for God’s set time to get here. And when Jesus does return, don’t worry, you won’t miss it. No one will. Jesus says people will faint or even die in terror when see these things taking place. Nations will be in great distress and anxiety because it will be nothing like what we have seen before. Those who don’t know what the signs mean with the sun, moon, stars, and the other-worldly noises from the seas will be greatly afraid.

But for you, God's people, when you see these things take place, **“Stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (v.28)**. When Jesus returns it won't be as a lowly baby born in a stable among the common people. He will come as the victorious king at the head of his angel army. He won't come to die again. He comes riding on the clouds to live and rule eternally. And Jesus, your King tells you, “Stand up! There is no need to hide. No reason to run for the hills to try and escape. I'm coming for you to bring you with me. Lift up your head! Do not hang your head in fear and shame. Be proud! Do not be afraid. Your redemption is drawing near.”

Already when Jesus died on the cross he redeemed us. We were slaves to sin and its desires. Slaves to the devil and his lies. Slaves to death. But Jesus redeemed us; that means he has bought us back and set us free. The price was his blood and he pays it in full. Jesus crushes the devil's head on the cross with his perfect life and innocent death destroying the devil's work. Sin does not control you or your life. Your sin died with Jesus on the cross and was buried with him in the tomb. From that tomb Jesus is raised from the dead breaking death's strong chains. Being redeemed means you are set free from sin and its guilt—God already declares you to be without sin. It means fear of death need not overwhelm you because death won't keep you down. It means you are no longer bound by Satan and his lies. Jesus has redeemed you and set you free.

And yet, as long as we live on this earth, we continue to wrestle against sin and its temptations. And we often lose. The devil remains the prince of this world and his lies are continually convincing. Death still comes to all because that is the result of us not being perfect. But when Jesus comes on the clouds, he returns to set us free completely from this sin-filled world. That sin will not follow you or tempt you anymore. The devil will be thrown into the depths of hell to suffer for eternity. Death will be a former thing that you will not remember and will not plague us again. We will be with the Lord forever!

What a great and glorious day that will be. And so, we want to be ready and waiting.

To help us Jesus draws our attention to the fig tree and other trees. We know from an early age that when we see those leaves, the seasons are changing, and summer is near. So Jesus gives us these signs in Luke so that we can clearly see: God's Kingdom is drawing near. It will come at any moment. It will spring like a trap so that by the time you realize it is here it will be too late to do anything differently.

Jesus gives us the warning because he knows how we can be. We can get lazy in our faith lives thinking there is plenty of time later to do what God wants us to be doing. Not only can we be lazy, we easily are distracted. One moment we are focused on the end goal and prize of eternal life, and the next we are chasing after something else. So Jesus warns: **“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap” (v.34)**.

For some it may be as straightforward as that. If you are living life as if you should be able to do whatever you want—carousing, wild living, getting drunk—then you are not being careful. And when Jesus returns, it will be too late.

But, Jesus is speaking to more than just those specific actions. Jesus is telling you and me to have self-control.

When we lose control or let go of that control it often comes from being too focused on and wrapped up in those anxieties, cares, and worries of daily life. You know and feel how those can weigh on your heart and mind. Thoughts about your reputation with others or dealing with how you view yourself (self-image) may weigh heavily on your mind. Concerns over finances and the budget (especially with Christmas coming up) can burden a heart. Making sure you are doing what is best for yourself, for your family, for your loved ones, getting your work done and the to-do-list accomplished while trying to keep everyone happy may be pulling you down.

Whether it's the expectations from others and responsibilities you have or it's just a desire to break up the monotony of life, you just want to escape. And so, different people use different things to try and deal with these anxieties of life. For some they turn to the partying. They may say they don't do it much; just enough to blow off some steam. For others it's having one too many drinks at home or numbing the mind with drugs. Some escape by watching TV and shows while others choose pornography and living in a fantasy world. Still others try and lose themselves in work while others push off as much responsibility as possible. And then shame and fear weigh on the heart because you know when you have not been ready as God desires. You know when you were not controlling yourself or living as a child of God should. You know you weren't being careful. Even if you don't directly recognize that, you still feel the shame and fear because, at the least on a subconscious level, you know you will have to answer for all that you have done or left undone.

Jesus gives us this warning because there will be no escaping that Day when he will return. It will close like a trap for all who live on the face of this earth. But Jesus' focus isn't on the destruction and terror when he returns. Jesus wants to give you hope so that we are always watching and prepared to stand before him on that day. And so he speaks to you through the Word of the Bible to keep your eyes of faith heavenward. He pulls you away from focusing too much on the here. As if he were zooming our eyes out, he shows us the big picture. He shows you that whatever you are facing today, it will end. Whether good or bad, it will not last forever. All these things in this world will pass away. But Jesus promises: My words will never pass away. Through the spoken Word from the Bible, the Word in the Lord's Supper and Baptism, Jesus gives us hope that rests entirely in him.

Being ready to stand before Him is not going to come from you promising to do better. It's not going to come from you completing your personal to-do list to improve your Christian living. It's Jesus who makes you worthy and ready. He cleans your stain of sin

redeeming you with the shedding of his blood. He washes you in the water of Baptism sealing to you God's promise that as His child those sins do not belong to you. He assures you that you are worthy as He invites you to receive his body and blood in the Lord's Supper giving you that forgiveness of sins again.

Through His Word, through those gifts of Lord's Supper and Baptism, Jesus gives you hope. This hope isn't a maybe or wishful thinking. This is Jesus' guarantee for you: God's kingdom is drawing near. It already rules in your heart through faith that the Spirit works in you. That faith trusts God's promise that for Jesus' sake your sins are forgiven. That faith believes that when Jesus returns we won't cower in fear because Jesus already declares you to be worthy.

And so we have hope. Mankind, in general, lives in hope. Hope that these struggles will pass. Hope that health will improve. Hope that whatever is hard and difficult will end. And we as God's people are hoping right along with them. You know the struggles you face in your life. You know how hard it can be. But we can give them so much more than just wishful thinking. We have the gift of Jesus' hope that guarantees a better brighter future; a future that will not end. So live in that hope that Jesus gives standing up under temptation and resisting the devil. Lift up your head and look for ways to serve those around you and opportunities to share this hope. And pray, pray that you will remain ready. Jesus will be here soon. Amen.