

Sermon Text: Luke 21:25-36

Now, as I've already told the 8:28 service, when I have a serious topic to preach, I try to begin with a little bit of humor. It doesn't always work. I do run that humor by Caroline, and she usually says, "No, it's not funny. Don't do it." I usually use it anyway. I did this morning, and I will again. I think it is a little bit funny, and it does get us onto the topic.

A little girl finished her homework one night. She was upset that her daddy was still at his desk in the den. She asked her mother, "Mommy, why does Daddy bring so much work home at night?" The mother said, "Because he just doesn't have time to finish it at work." The little girl was thinking of school, and she said, "Why don't they put him in a slower group? Where's Caroline? See, it is.

Now, to swap gears, but to kind of dovetail into that, I'll tell you who the slow group is, those who think they can do whatever they want and catch up later. Those who think there will always be enough time to fix things in the family, to fix things with your spouse, to fix things with old friends, and to fix things with God. Advent says we don't know how much time we have. We don't know how much time the world has. Make good use of your time. Advent, as a season, reminds us that God came unexpectedly at Bethlehem, and God will come again unexpectedly. Be found ready. Be found using and redeeming the time. Have a life worthwhile, a faith worthwhile. Work on the questions. Work on the doubts. Work through the bitterness and despair, and get to the other side so that when you meet God, you can hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Advent urges us to get ready for God's victory over the forces of chaos and death and decay. Someone has said that this apocalyptic word speaks of time collapsing. The time of the end becomes the end of time. It's a scary, scary reading. Once upon a time, people took it more seriously. They believed that the end of the world was imminent, and that Jesus would return, and that it would be soon. That is what we've heard in this apocalyptic reading from Luke. The idea is also engraved, you may be surprised to know, you can look this up, up in the dome of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington. It's engraved, "One far off divine event toward which all creation moves." Speaking of the return of Christ and the final judgment. For now, we mostly have stopped thinking much about the return of Christ or of judgment or any far-off events at all. We've stopped thinking much beyond today for the most part.

I spoke to a good friend of mine, who is in his first year teaching high school. He had been teaching tech, and moved over to high school. He found out that if you're the first-year teacher, you get the least desirable classes. It kind of works that way. He was complaining about the undisciplined and disrespectful students. I tried to be helpful, and I said, to be future oriented, I said, "Well, when does your summer vacation start?" He said, "Summer! Summer! I can't think that far ahead. I'm just trying to make it through today!"

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Many of us are just trying to make it through the day. Our culture has built a world view about the future and about how things ought to be, not based upon God, but based upon technology and science and education and the promise that all these things, when evenly distributed and properly done and perfected, that everything will be well, and peace and prosperity will break out in the entire world. We have this worldview of things and technology and science and education. We think that the world won't end, that we'll just continue to become better and better and better all by ourselves and not needing God anymore, that the world will not end, and America will always be, and that every time I pick up the phone there will be a dial tone, and every time I flip the switch on the wall, there will be light, and nothing is ever going to be changed. Don't be silly!

There is a modern proverb I want to share. There was once a spider, which lived in a cornfield. He was a big spider, and he had spun a beautiful web between the cornstalks. He liked his home, and he planned to stay there the rest of his life. One day the spider caught a little bug in his web, and just as the spider was about to eat the bug, the bug said, “Hey! If you let me go, I'll tell you something important that may save your life!” The spider paused for a moment and listened. He was amused. The bug said, “You better get out of this cornfield because the harvest is coming!” The spider smiled and said, “What is this harvest you're talking about? I think you're just telling me a story!” The bug said, “Oh, no! It's true. The owner of this field is coming to harvest it soon, and all the stalks will be knocked down, and the corn will be gathered up, and you'll be killed by a giant machine if you stay.” The spider said, “I don't believe in harvest and giant machines that knock down cornstalks! How can you prove this?” The little bug pointed out, and said, “Just look at the corn. Do you see how it's planted in rows? That is proof that there is an owner.” The spider laughed. He said, “Corn always grows that way!” The bug went on to explain, “Oh no! This field belongs to the owner who planted it, and the harvest is coming soon.” The spider grinned, and said to the little bug, “I don't believe you!” Then the spider ate the little bug for lunch. A few days later, the spider was thinking to himself and laughing out loud about what the bug had told him. “A harvest! What a silly idea! I've lived my whole life here, and nothing has ever disturbed me. I've been here since the stalks were just one foot off the ground, and I'll be here forever because nothing is ever going to change in this field. Life is good, and I have it made.” The next day was a beautiful sunny day in the cornfield, and the sky was clear, and there was no wind at all. That afternoon the spider was just about to take a nap, and he noticed some thick dusty clouds moving his way, and he could hear the roar of a great engine. He said to himself, “I wonder what that could be?”

Even when houses are being blown down next to us, we, as do the three little pigs, say, “I shall build a bigger, stronger house than theirs.” I shall build a bigger stronger house than theirs. Nothing like that will ever happen to me. I'm afraid our worldview is made of straw. It isn't very substantial, and it's prone to catch fire at any moment.

A friend of mine in Charleston, I always get a little choked up when I tell this because it's absolutely true, served on a nuclear submarine. He was trained to survive and strike back in case of a first nuclear strike. He thought a little each day about nuclear war, the

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constant threat, the retaliation, and one night as Andy was onshore and was crossing the Cooper River Bridge, high up where you can see the whole city of Charleston, he said that he saw all the lights go out at once. The whole city just went black. He told me later that his heart sank, and he thought he knew what it was. He prayed and waited for the flash and waited for the explosion. Now, Andy was wrong that time, but he spent his entire career in the Navy getting ready for that sort of moment.

Not as a fear monger, but as a pastor, I think from time to time I must ask you, “Are you ready to meet God?” When you go up and down your checklist of faith, is love turned on, is faith turned on, good works flowing from your faith turned on, humility on, self-control on, truthfulness on, bitterness turned off; grudges, judgment, arrogance, haughtiness disabled; forgiveness fully operational from God to you to others who have sinned against you? If so, then you’re ready. In every age and every individual life, the door is closing and has been closing since the day you were born. Be sure, be very sure that what you value most and spend your life upon most as a foundation is God. In the end, it just isn’t possible to build a house strong enough to save us or save ourselves from disaster, from disease or from death, and no matter the nation, no matter the political system, the time or the era, the amount of money, or the steel-reinforced retirement plans we have, nothing we can do ever lasts forever, but something does. Something does last forever! It isn’t ours and it isn’t from our efforts. It is God. God who was before all things, God who will be after all things, God whose word was made flesh in Jesus Christ will not pass away even when the earth is no more. It is meant, Advent is meant to be a message of hope and of also confronting the reality of our hubris, of our arrogance, of our trifling input into the final outcome. God comes and everything we thought we owned or trusted for our safety, where is it? We are dust says Genesis, and all that we trust is made of dust, except God.

So be on guard says Luke 21:34 that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness in the worries of this life that that day catch you unexpectedly. Even if the stars are falling out of the sky, yet will I trust God. Disappointment, disaster, disease – even death – do not have the final word. God does. In the beginning, God, in the end, God, after the end, God. Amen.