

“GODISNOWHERE”

09, Nov 29, Advent 1

Luke 21: 25- 36

#### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

- Today’s scripture reading from Luke is found also in the gospels of Mathew and Mark. It speaks of the end of time, when the “Son of Man” will come as judge and redeemer. This will be preceded by a time of great upheaval and turmoil.
- It speaks of signs in the heavens and the earth, and the son of man coming in the clouds. This same imagery is found in the book of Daniel. Daniel was writing at a time of persecution and suffering. His intention was to offer to offer hope and consolation.
- And so his imagery is evoked again in the gospels, which were also written at a time of turmoil and suffering. The unthinkable had happened. Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. The temple raised to the ground. Jews, including “Followers of Jesus” were scattered and persecuted.
- But now Jesus is seen as the “Son of Man”- he referred to himself this way. Christians believed that, Jesus, the Messiah, would in the end return and put to right everything that was wrong in this world.
- Certainly this use of Daniel’s vision is a word of hope spoken again, into a time of darkness and turmoil, appropriate for the first Sunday in Advent.
- Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. Even as the days around us grow shorter and darker, Christians declare that the LIGHT is increasing, that God is approaching- this is what Advent means, “to draw near, to approach.”
- Let us hear God’s word of hope as it comes to us according the gospel of Luke. 21: 25- 36

#### SERMON

A true story: A teenager made a cardboard sign reading, “GOD IS NOWHERE” and stood with it on a street corner - it was written exactly as the sermon title is written in the worship folder. His father, a rabbi, was horrified. “What are you thinking?” he said, “You’re going to stand on a corner and spread doom and despair?”. GOD IS NOWHERE!?

“No, dad” the boy said, “You’re READING it wrongly. It says GOD IS NOW HERE”.

Today’s scripture calls us to read the signs correctly. We’re told that in the natural world, the appearance of green leaves is a sure sign that summer is approaching.

In the supernatural world, we're inclined to see certain signs of god coming near too- We see God approaching in acts of kindness and goodness. But the scripture this morning calls us to look for less obvious signs of God's nearness.

Signs that we may read with despairing hearts, when in fact they are signs of hope. Signs not of everything breaking apart, but of God breaking into this world to make the world new.

As human beings, our vision is limited. We see only a small part of God's plan.

At those times when all that we see is catastrophe and disaster, we need to trust, trust that a larger plan IS unfolding, that God is not absent, but drawing near.

You may know the classic wisdom story about an old man who had just one son and a horse.

One day, his horse galloped away into the hills. His neighbours said to him, "That's such bad luck to have lost your horse". "Oh... Why do you say that?" replied the old man. "Who's to say whether it's bad luck?"

The next night the horse returned, and he led back with him twelve wild horses. The neighbours said, "What extraordinary good luck – to have thirteen horses!" And the old man replied. "Who's to say whether it's good luck?"

The old man's son went out riding one of the new horses. But it was wild, and the boy was thrown from its back, and he broke his leg. The neighbours said, "ohh, what bad luck- your son has broken his leg." The old man responded. "Who's to say whether it's bad luck?"

Then the militia came to the village, conscripting all the able-bodied young men to fight in the war, where many would be killed. But they passed by the boy with a broken leg. "How lucky you are," the neighbours said. .... And the old man smiled

We simply do not know the big picture, but we're urged in today's scripture to stay alert, to watch, to trust that God is drawing near, no matter what our circumstances. To stay open to God's possibilities.

To do this, we need to let go of what WE want. We need to let go of OUR idea of what is good. When we cling to what we want, we set ourselves up for despair. We keep hope alive by letting go of control, by being open to possibilities beyond our imagining.

I was so touched by the interview not long ago between CBC Journalist Melissa Fung and the Columbian politician, Ingrid Betancourt. They both had been held hostage, in very difficult circumstances. And they were talking about prayer, how they had prayed, and what they had found helpful.

Melissa, had been imprisoned in a hole in the ground in the middle of nowhere, always with a captor present. She shared how in the beginning she prayed for what she wanted, like no ants or bugs, or a bigger piece of bread.

But later she found it more helpful to pray, “God, you know what I need. Just give it to me quickly” It was in the end handing it over to God that helped her get through.

When we cling to our idea of what we need, when we say, if THIS can’t be different, then I don’t want what you offer, God, that is the beginning of despair. When we say, “I trust you, Lord, my future is in your hands,” that is the beginning of hope.

When we cling to our idea of what is needed, when we cannot bend, we will break. Hope begins when we let go of our wishes and look to God.

There is a lovely little psalm # 131 where it says “I have calmed my soul, like a weaned child”. A weaned child is not fed whenever they cry, like a baby is, but the child has learned to trust that the mother will still give them food, and so the child waits and trusts.

In our distress, we may have our ideas of what will relieve us, but we cannot know how God will provide. We may be ill and want desperately for the illness to be taken away.

God’s plan is larger than ours. God may not take away the illness, but may instead provide what we need to deal with it, to cope with it, and our inner strengthening may become a gift and an inspiration of hope for others.

I think of Merv, who used to come to our healing services- to pray for others. Merv had diabetes, was a double amputee and almost blind, and because of his indomitable spirit, the doctors would use him to speak with others who were facing amputation. His trust in God made him an instrument of hope for others.

I think of Andrew and Leonora Obara, who 8 years ago started adopting AIDS orphans. Till they had adopted 5 orphans in addition to their own 5 children. Although they were both working at the time, they struggled and were always in debt. Their children were sometimes sent home from school because the fees were not paid.

But they prayed. They simply trusted that God would somehow provide for their family.

Who would have imagined that 2 years later God would bring together Leonora and Robyn from our congregation, at an International social work conference? So that our congregation might provide support for their family of now FIFTEEN children?

What are the chances of such a thing happening for a Kenyan family? Andrew's acutely aware of the hand of God in this. He tells his children, "This is a chance of a life time, grab onto it, take hold of it,"

When we see God breaking in, in a miraculous way, we call it a Kairos moment. A moment of OPPORTUNITY. A moment where we can choose to do something fine and good, we can choose to do something for God..

Today's scripture tells us these moments may happen at any time: we need to stay alert, to watch for what God may be doing, so that we may seize the moment, grab onto it, and join God in the new thing that is being brought about.

In 2001, a man was walking his dog on a river-side path in Bedfordshire, England. He found an ancient gold penny. It turned out to be an 8<sup>th</sup> century coin , worth half a million dollars

Now it wasn't really an ACCIDENT that the man found the coin. - He is an amateur metal detector enthusiast. He has an eye for metal and coins on the ground. He is ALWAYS looking even while walking his dog.

Like that man, WE need to keep our eyes peeled for the wonders that God is doing, with all the possibilities that brings, even in the midst of disaster, especially in the midst of disaster, we are, as the scripture says, "to stand up and raise our heads and know that our redemption is drawing near."

How do we keep looking up though? In the midst of the catastrophes, in the midst of the tsunamis of our lives?. When the water has gone over our heads and there is nothing solid under our feet? How do we cling to hope?

Possibly the most important help is community. Faith community that affirms our core belief that God is not nowhere but that God is now here.

Faith community that reminds us of God's promises, that tells the stories of God, that shares how we see God acting in our lives. Community that turns to God when, in our personal pain, WE can see no point in doing so. Community that cares, when it seems that no one else does.

Oftentimes we take this faith community for granted. We believe it will always be here for when we need it. And by the grace of God this may be true. But community, like anything else needs to be fostered and to be built. We all have a role to play in this.

Our community will be a place of hope, if WE carry God's promises in our own hearts, if we FEED on God's Word, and foster our OWN prayer life, we will be able to bring hope to one another.

We nurture and build this community of hope by meeting together regularly to worship, to pray, to care for one another and to work for the good of the world. We foster and build this community of hope, when we dedicate our funds to making this church strong.

We love to give our money to CONCRETE needs where we can see the results: to feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, housing the homeless, and to do so is to express the very heart of God.

But we should not underestimate the value and importance of this faith community as centre of hope-  
in our own lives; and a centre out of which hope flows to others.

In fostering this community, we foster hope. The continuation of this community is the foundation for  
all our good deeds, that become signs of hope for others who may have no faith. The continuation of  
this community provides for ourselves and our children in the midst of tsunamis. The continuation of  
this faith community gives meaning to our lives and combats despair.

This is why we gather together in faith to declare week after week, that God is Now. God is Here.. We  
remind one another to stay alert and to look!

Especially in the season of Advent, we're aware of something stirring in the world, a movement of the  
Spirit, an undercurrent that is looking for a time, a place to emerge, to be born in our midst.

Every moment may be a Kairos moment, a moment of opportunity, a God moment. Will we see that  
moment? Will we seize it? That others too may know that God is not NOWHERE, that God is NOW  
HERE?

To God be all the praise the honour and the glory,

Amen.