

First Sunday in Advent Year C

December 2, 2018

Psalm 25:1-9

Thessalonians 3:9-13

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36

Last Sunday, Lois preached on the Festival of Christ the King. The festival was meant to be the New Year's Eve event of the church year celebrated the last Sunday before Advent begins. At the end of her sermon, Lois wished us a Happy Church New Year. Since today is the first Sunday in Advent marking the beginning of Year C of our liturgical calendar, I also wish you a Happy New Year.

In Luke's Gospel read this morning, Jesus was speaking in the country of Judea occupied by the Romans. The people felt they had little left for them in their world. Jesus' words were frightening. It seemed like all hell had broken loose – the sun, moon, stars, and sea are in an uproar. Everyone all over their world was in a panic. The wind was knocked 'out of their sails' by the threat of doom. Those in power were quaking. The wrath of God was upon them. Clearly, the Advent of the Son of Man would be coming in a great cloud with great power and glory. He would be welcomed in grand style. The faithful could continue to hope to see the redemption of God's people.

Sounds like Apocalyptic literature! For those who possess power and who are benefiting from the way things were, such literature often has negative energy around it especially for those who were and are anxious or uncertain.

So what is Luke's Gospel saying to us?

Luke is telling us redemption is at hand. Just as the people of Judea were mixed in their reception of Jesus, so too will our world be at His second coming.

If people can read the signs in nature as in Jesus' lesson of the fig tree, we should be willing and able to read the signs of deliverance. The coming of the Son of Man will be sudden. We need to be vigilant and pray.

Jesus understands our anxiety and reminds us to focus not on what humanity is doing, but on what God is doing. Advent is the liturgical season pointing us toward the Jesus Movement that our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry faithfully reminds us to follow! There are signs of hope and renewal if we stay focused and alert by putting worry on the 'back burner.' We need our strength and wits to make it through each and every day that's coming and end up on our feet in front of the manger.

Being anxious is very much a part of being human. We worry about our health, our children and grandchildren, friends and neighbors. We worry about world events that include military conflicts and natural disasters. We worry about tomorrow and it isn't even here yet.

Worry is a habit we acquire through repetition. Concerns for others who are struggling with addiction, finances, or marital strife often reinforces the worry habit until it becomes a powerful, destructive obsession.

Worry is not productive. It does not solve the problems. We need to let go and let God – entrusting Him with the outcomes. Worrying does not help God get the job done.

So how do we let go? It may help to name the fear – perhaps even write it down in a journal. Sometimes when I do that I place my worry in my Bible symbolically placing my fear in God's Word and Hand.

While we are moving forward through time, we can never set foot on anything but the present moment. When we project a future that may never happen, we are only borrowing trouble. Living one day at a time and looking for the gifts in any given moment allows us to have a more worry-free life.

There are numerous support groups that deal with just about any concerning issues. Families Against Narcotics, Families Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Nar-Non help with addiction concerns. Weight Watchers and TOPS (Taking off Pounds Sensibly) deal with weight control. There are support groups for bereavement, health problems such as cancer and heart disease, marital issues, singles, widows, widowers and many more. We can choose a group to help us gain peace rather than tormenting ourselves with useless worries. Most groups suggest you attend several meetings before you decide if that group is for you. If not, search out another. Getting recommendations from family and friends can be helpful.

Nourishing our spiritual health is very important. Taking our anxious moments to the cross and leaving them there with our bad moments, mad moments and anxious moments may mean

only good moments are left. We can read our bibles and other spiritual literature, pray, worship and surround ourselves with positive people. Exercising can release stress. Enjoying God's creation by taking a simple walk can help change our focus from worry to enjoyment.

Our minds are accustomed to wandering into the future. When we find ourselves caught up with such thoughts, it may be helpful to recognize we are roaming in a fantasy world. We can try to return to the present allowing thankfulness and appreciation for the moment God has given us.

Rick and Julie Garmon have been married for forty years. Julie says they have argued about one thing in particular. In her Daily Guideposts writing for January 17th of this year she wrote that she loved being prepared and doing things ahead of schedule. Rick however was laid-back and rarely worried. One night during the 11:00 p.m. news, the weather man forecasted the possibility of snow. Right away Julie wanted to run to the store. Rick didn't believe the prediction. Being the constant worrier, Julie was concerned about losing power and meat in the freezer thawing. Of course, Rick was not and just wanted her to relax.

Sure enough, the next morning the house was cold and dark. No power. No heat. The backyard was snow-covered. Julie was annoyed and quick to let Rick know that she and the weatherman were right.

Rick got out of bed and said he would set up the generator. Julie didn't even know that Rick purchased the generator a few

years ago. Minutes later it was up and running bringing enough power to save the meat, keep the outdoor parakeets warm, and to make coffee.

Julie had doubted her husband would take care of her, the same way she doubted God could handle her fears and worries. Filled with admiration and gratitude, she crunched her way through the snowy yard, the air smelling woodsy, like home and wintertime and safety. She worried for nothing. Julie told Rick his survival skills impressed her.

Rick winked at Julie and said, “Just doing my job, ma’am.”

Julie thought about the times she assumed God was not doing His job. She began to realize that God did have everything under control.

We are being invited by Jesus to focus on the big picture – on what God has done in history and continuing to do each and every day. God’s love pours into our world. Love and hope pours upon the sick, He shows the way of healing. To the bereaved he gives the power of reunion. For the dying he lights the flame of Resurrection. To the confused, he offers the light of Scriptures. God gives us love and hope.

After worship this morning, I have a refrigerator magnet for you. There is a picture of an Advent wreath with the word ‘Hope’ written on it. May it be a reminder of what Advent and Christmas are about.

During this season of Advent may we try with God’s help to make a point of meeting today’s problems with today’s

strength! There is no need to start tackling tomorrow's problems until tomorrow comes. Living in the moment is the only way to have a life. Enjoy the Blessings of today one moment at a time. Be still and listen for God's message of comfort. Stay Alert! Watch for the signs! Pray and be ready!

O come O Come Emmanuel – be with us during this season of Advent as we watch for signs and renew our hope as we prepare to celebrate the gift of God's Son lying in the manger.

Resources for this sermon:

The Message p. 1904

Today a Better Way – Families Anonymous 12 Step Book of meditations

Lectionary Levity by Ian S. Markham and Samantha R.E. Gottlick p. 181

Mocha with Max by Max Lucado

Jesus Always by Sarah Young, p. 339

Daily Guideposts Meditation by Julie Garmon, January 17, 2018 pp. 25-27

Bible Commentary by Michael F. Patella-The Gospel According to Mark