

Populus Zion, The Second Sunday in Advent, A ✕ D 2008

Luke 21:25-36 "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." ²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 One day everything was normal. People could enjoy their lives and their liberties. What reason did they have to be afraid of a flood? Rain had never even fallen on the earth, let alone the kind of rain that could flood everything, destroy homes, and put everyone to death. One day it seemed normal to mock Noah and his family of religious fanatics for building an enormous ark. One day the ground was dry and the world was safe. The next day, the skies opened up for the very first time and let forth torrents of rain. One day everyone was alive and happy; the next, every human being except the eight in the ark was drowned to death. One day sin was fun and comfortable. The next day it meant death.

2 One day things were normal in Sodom. People could enjoy their vices. What reason did they have to be afraid of fire and brimstone raining down from the skies? Fire had never fallen from heaven before, let alone fallen to destroy entire cities. One day it seemed normal to harass righteous Lot and his family of religious lunatics for refusing to engage in the city-wide debauchery. The next day, sulfur and fire rained down on

Sodom and Gomorrah, burning them to the ground. One day everyone was safe and secure in Sodom, the next day everyone, except those who had been ushered to the hills by the angelic visitors, was dead, burned to death. One day sin was fun and comfortable. The next day it meant death.

3 One day things are normal in the world. People can enjoy their lives; they can eat drink and be merry as long as they like. What reason do they have to fear the skies being torn open and God the Righteous Judge descending from heaven with the blast of a trumpet and an angelic army around Him? Such a thing has never before happened. It seems preposterous to believe such a thing will happen. One day it's popular and en vogue to ridicule those who make faith a priority; one day it's important to get enough sleep on Sunday mornings; one day it's convenient to live your life as you see fit. One day the arrogant and all evildoers have all the fun; the next day they are set ablaze. One day everything is as it has been for thousands of years; the next day the sun is black, the moon is blood-red, and the stars fall from the skies as the Lord of Creation returns. One day sin is comfortable and fun; the next day it means eternal death.

4 "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times." This is Jesus' warning to His Church: do not be like the world. The world may do whatever it wants; you may not. The world can live without regard for the Word of God; you may not. The world can tend to the pleasures of the flesh: drunkenness, dissipation, worshipping goods before God, misusing the name of God and refusing to call on Him in prayer, refusing to hear the Word of God on the Sabbath, despising parents and other authorities, taking care of yourself without regard for others, having sex outside marriage, taking whatever you want, gossiping, wanting more than you

have. The world can do these things; you may not. Faith will not permit you to break God's commandments willfully. Faith does the good works God has for you to do. Willful sin, persistent sin, intentional sin: these are the hallmarks of faithless sleep that will find you caught in the trap of the Last Day. Sin is serious. Repent now or perish eternally.

5 Jesus isn't joking. The world will end. Heaven and earth will pass away. All that will remain of this world is His Word, and you will either be condemned by that Word or declared righteous by it. Jesus Himself gives you signs that should evoke your repentance: distress of nations in perplexity, roaring of the sea and waves, people fainting with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world, the powers of the heavens shaken, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, nation rising against nation. Every word of people in fear, every depressing newscast, every gloomy headline is a call to repent.

6 How do you know when the Day is near? Look at the tree. In the winter, the tree looks dead. But as winter draws to a close, the buds come out on the tree. And you know by the presence of buds and leaves that summer is near. Look at the tree. The tree of life in the Garden of Eden, once the sign of the eternal summer of God's good creation, grew leafless and dead. On the dead wood of the tree of life was nailed the Son of God. As He died, the sun went black, the earth shook, there was fainting with fear and foreboding of what was coming on the world. But from the tree of death, the tree of the curse, the tree of the death of God comes the fruit of forgiveness of sins and the fruit of faith. When the otherwise dead tree of the cross bears the fruit of faith, you know the Return of Jesus is near. The tree is coming out in leaf. The tree is bearing fruit, producing faith where the cross of Christ is preached. The Summer of the new Eden is near.

7 Now, not later, is the day for repentance. Today is the day of God's mercy. As long as you retain the Lord's gift of faith, you need not fear the Day of the return of Christ. Moreover, with God's gift of faith, the day of Christ's Return is a day to look forward to. With the Lord's gift of faith, with His ongoing forgiveness of sins, this is not the day of your damnation but the day of your salvation. When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. When you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. The kingdom of Satan is in its twilight. The kingdom of God is near, the day of your deliverance from the world, from temptation, from sickness and every affliction, from pain and persecution, from sadness and mourning.

8 The kingdom of God is near. The return of Jesus is near. It's so near that you can touch it and taste it. Yes, indeed, the kingdom of God comes to you in the Lord's Supper. In the Body and Blood of Jesus present upon the altar and placed into your mouth is the guarantee that when Jesus returns, it will be the day of your salvation and not the day of your damnation. As certainly as He comes to you in bread and wine to deliver the precious forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, He will come to you when the heavens are rent open. He is returning for His beloved. Lift up your heads; the day of your redemption is near.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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