

“The King Will Come”
Advent I - November 28, 2021 - Luke 21:25-26/C

One of my favorite scenes in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (C.S. Lewis' first book of the classic **Chronicles of Narnia**) three children find themselves in a strange and fantastic world. A talking beaver welcomes them into his home and explains that the land they are in is being held captive by an evil sorceress, but hope is beginning to blossom. The true king, Aslan, is returning, you see, and when Mr. Beaver explains that Aslan is a lion, Susan, one of the children asks,

“Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver,

“if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most, or else just silly.”

“Then he *isn't* safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you?

Who said anything about *safe*? 'Course he isn't *safe*. But he's **good**.

He's the **King**, I tell you.”

He's the King, I tell you. That's what we all said and sang about as we closed out the Church Year last week on Christ the King Sunday - and began to look forward to the fresh perspective of a new storyteller - through the Gospel of St. Luke. But the reality of a King returning to claim his rightful position among us can be little bit nerve-wracking and exciting at the same time! It all depends on how you feel about the King.

I mean, what if Jesus sent us a *Save the Date* for November 28, 2022? What would be your **first** reaction? Fear - as your guilt and sin scroll across your screen? Sadness that you won't see your kids grow up and hold your grandkids? Disappointment - that you'll never get to build that dream house when you retire? Fair enough. Now, what's your **second** reaction? Be honest! Maybe for the first time in your life you've allowed yourself to think, “I'm ready. I'm so tired of this world, I'm looking forward to God truly taking over and taking care of me and those I love.”

Just like imagining heaven, we probably have difficulty even conceiving of this future. But the cycle of Life. Death. New Life is (and always has been) God's agenda. So, are you in the “Hold, on Wait a Minute” Camp or the “How Long O Lord?” Camp this morning? If your reaction surprises you a little - Fear Not! We probably have more time to wait; to ponder; to build up the suspense with a sense of anticipation. Advent has arrived - and even if you have already decked the halls and thrown yourself into Christmas with gusto, now you have time, you know - to breathe in - to remain prayerful and expectant.

Today we are listening to Jesus' sermon on the end times, which began a few weeks ago in Mark's gospel and now finishes up in the gospel of Luke. So, of what importance is the Second Coming to us, really? What does Jesus have to say to his beloved followers without completely freaking them out? “*There will be signs*” - earthquakes and famine - confusion, distress and foreboding at the earth, moon and stars in upheaval - birthpangs - of Creation in chaos. We've seen some of those signs. So how could we not be afraid of the end? How are we supposed to respond? We are to “*stand up and raise our heads*” as if to look that chaos right in the eye...because “*our redemption is drawing near.*” Wow. “*Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down...and the day catch you like a trap.*” In other words, don't get so involved in the ways of the world, that you buy in to the fear the world will feel when they see the end of the story coming and

realize how wrong they have been! It's not because they didn't know, it's that they thought it wouldn't happen to them. They found it, irrelevant.

"Be alert at all times, praying, that you may have the strength to escape all these things." It's not the chaos of the end times that we are praying to escape, **we** are to be redeemed along with the wholeness of all of Creation. **We pray** to have the strength to escape the entrapment of the world.

Jesus was speaking to a crowd of followers that knew about how hard it was to be Light living amongst the darkness. And in this "God's eye view" of his life, poised to enter Jerusalem and his Passion, Jesus speaks this word: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."* That Word of the Lord is God's faithfulness, the fulfillment of the promise to be with us always and to love us no matter what – to love us beyond all measure.

But this teaching is hard, and needs context and perspective. We cannot hear with the ears of those who walked day after day past the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, now set up for the worship of the pagan Roman god, Jupiter. We cannot hear with the ears of those who had lost their identity, their tradition, their religious frameworks – and now had to find some new life by following a rabbi from Nazareth...the One they were convinced was the Messiah, the Son of God, the Light of the World. We cannot hear with those ears. But we can hear with ours. For we have been experiencing recently what much of the rest of the world experiences on a daily basis. So perhaps we need to stop and consider what "others" know, and learn to hear with different ears. For this teaching is what we call "*apocalyptic*," a Greek word that means "revealing." And the purpose of this revealing is to bring hope in situations which might appear to us to be hope-less.

Living with death and darkness so close around us might make it more urgent for us to seek to transform our time and our relationships. Maybe if we could put all the days of our lives into a puzzle box - for we know how our lives began and we have been told how it all will end in God. So, imagine now - with your life in a box - that you could take some time to ponder the contents. Now, ask yourself where you chose badly, what you might have done to be better, and where you wish you had focused on those around you rather than on yourself. If each one of us could have our life gathered from beginning to end in a box to observe, we might see some places where a small change could better bring Light into the darkness...things that Jesus shared, things that could transform us all. Things like: *Love one another. Don't worry about tomorrow. Forgive your brother. Consider the lilies. Release the captives. Follow me. Stand up and raise your head!*

The season of Advent begins with a focus on Christ's second coming, which can be terrifying for those who are unaware of God's redemptive work and for those who cling to the things of this world. But the Advent season is also a time when we are reminded that as Christians, we have the answer to the puzzle box. We know to what this world is coming, and we have the chance to live our lives differently because we have glimpsed the ending. That's what Advent is all about. Not simply a four-week countdown to the glory of Christmas, as a baby born in Bethlehem answers the questions a few thousand years old. But a time to actually breathe - to remain prayerful and expectant. as we await Christ's coming for the very 1st time, and for the time when that birth brings new birth and new life to all of God's Creation. For we are here today in the mystical, magical time of anticipation: the Season of Hope and Light and Waiting. Welcome to **our** season, The Season of Advent. AMEN.

Pastor Susan Langhauser, Advent Lutheran Church, Olathe, KS

Resources: C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collier, 1970); Jason Fisher, Champaign, IL., for ELCA Faith Lens; Rev. Susan Andrews, PCUSA; Chris R. Schlauch, Boston University School of Theology; Dennis Bratcher and Rebecca Lyman, CDSP