

1st Sunday in Advent

December 2, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

I'm having trouble with the fact that it's December. I had a great summer. And did you notice that summer just kept hanging on this year? I'm not ready for December. Are you? But I was out at my favorite shopping spots this week—Home Depot, Target, and Walmart—and it's obvious--the Christmas shopping season is well underway.

It's happened here at church too. The Christmas trees are up, the poinsettias are in their place. We've entered the season of Christmas. Although, technically, today is the first Sunday of what we in the church call Advent. Advent is a word that simply means coming. The color for the season is blue. It is four weeks of expectant waiting for the birth of Jesus. Make a note: the Greek word for Advent is Parousia, which means "coming". But in the New Testament, this word Parousia applies to the second coming of Christ. So, as we prepare for the birth of Jesus—the first coming of Christ, at the same time we are looking forward to the second coming of Christ. And this is why we have this strange gospel from Luke 21:25-36. These verses come from a sermon Jesus preached about his second coming. Jesus' second coming on the last day and Jesus' first coming at Christmas are closely related because they teach the same thing—God has his hand in human history. And history is moving in a specific direction.

A lot of people don't believe that. A lot of people believe that life is just random. Things happen for no real meaning or purpose. A recent article in Scientific American was entitled, "How Randomness Rules Our World." The article used the "Monty Hall

Problem”—three doors, door #1, door #2, and door #3. You choose one of the three doors. Monty tells you, “Behind two doors there are goats. But behind one door there’s a brand new car!” Then Monty opens one of the doors. It’s a goat. You didn’t choose that door, thank goodness. Then Monty asks, “Do you want to trade the door you did choose for the last unopened door?” What should you do? If you are a mathematician you know what to do. Your best chance of winning the car comes if you switch doors—your odds are almost 10 times greater. But the point of the article is this—it’s random, it’s all chance. Our lives from birth to death, from college to career, from the first to the eighteenth hole—are a series of countless random events that tend to cancel each other out. In other words, life has no real meaning, direction or purpose.

You know something--I believe that Christmas teaches us something very different. If we are willing to see it, Christmas helps us see that God has not abandoned us. He is not ignoring us. Life is not a random series of meaningless events. God has a plan. He has a purpose. And He is inviting you to be a part of His plan. Although, I’ll be the first to admit that sometimes it feels like life is spinning out of control. My life has been like that lately. Too many things are happening and not all of them good. I think you know what I mean--the death of someone you love, trouble at home, sickness, financial struggles, the loss of a job, you don’t know what the future holds. Is anybody in control? But here comes Christmas as a reminder. God has not abandoned you. God has not forgotten you. He is still in control.

But this time of Advent—this time of waiting can be overwhelming. The time of Christmas can be a difficult time for some of us—maybe it’s the money, maybe it’s the stress, maybe it’s the people who won’t be around this Christmas, maybe it’s the people who will be around. Let’s just talk for a minute about how we can make it through the next 23 days. How can we come to Christmas with joy and expectation and hope—even if life isn’t perfect, right now? Let’s look at what Jesus says in Luke 21--

First, Jesus says, LOOK UP! Jesus said, (Luke 21:25-28) “***And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the***

earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the raging of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus says, **“There will be chaos in the world.”** Sounds like the world today, doesn’t it? Fear, terrorism, global warming, trade wars, Brexit, fires, migrants at the border, border walls, a government shutdown. Jesus’ words are powerful—**“Now when these things happen”**—“when” not “if”. These things are going to happen, but they don’t last forever. Jesus says, **“Your redemption is drawing near.”** Aren’t those great words to hear! But we’ve got to believe it! Not just about some distant day when Jesus returns—these words are for now—today! **“Lift up your heads for your redemption is drawing near!”** There’s an old saying, “Two men looked out from behind the same prison bars. One saw mud and the other saw stars.” As Jesus says, we need to look up! Our worst days are not permanent. They don’t last forever.

Second, TAKE HOLD OF YOUR HEART. Jesus tells us, (Luke 21:34-36) **“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. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

Now, we don’t often see the word “dissipation.” Literally, it means to drink to excess—to drink so much you get sick and wake up to a major hangover. Basically, Jesus is saying, “Watch out so that the cares and concerns and the fears of the world don’t consume you.” And he’s right. How many times do we find ourselves struggling with some problem in life and we try to handle it by going shopping or by eating or drinking to excess? Or we gamble. Or we dive into porn. Or we do any number of things that give us a

moment's pleasure, but take us further and further away from God. Jesus says, ***“Don't do that. Don't let your hearts get weighed down.”***

In the book of Colossians, Paul says, ***“If then you have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”*** (Colossians 3:1) Do you see what Paul is telling us to do? **SEEK THE THINGS THAT ARE ABOVE!** That's where Jesus is—seated at the right hand of God. He's there for you. He's there when life's so good it can't get any better ... he's there when we struggle to get out of bed. I'm encouraging you, over these next 23 days, take care of your heart. Don't let anything come between you and your relationship with Jesus. Not parties, not drinking, not shopping, nothing. Make it your daily habit to give your heart to Him and look up. Keep your eyes on Jesus. A baby is coming—the promise of eternity.