

## The In-Between Space

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Advent 1: Luke 21:25-36

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[Jesus said:] <sup>25</sup> “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

<sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>34</sup> “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

*We are in the time in-between. Between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming. His disciples and first believers thought it would be in their life-time. We are still waiting. But it is an expectant, hopeful waiting. Not one full of despair and worry. The end goal for all Christians is to be with Jesus. To stand in front of Him.*

Happy Thanksgiving a little late! Happy Advent, today! We know that economically the Christmas season begins before Thanksgiving. But on the calendar this year, because Thanksgiving fell on the 28<sup>th</sup>, the period between the two holidays is five days shorter. So if it feels like there is less time for all our Christmas preparations, there is!

We are in-between the two holidays, even though now everything culturally has switched to Christmas. We are in-between raking leaves and shoveling snow. We are in-between the time of Christ’s first coming and His second.

There is this great Greek word, chora. It is understood to mean, ‘the space between spaces.’ The time between our sinful world and it’s redemption at Christ’s arrival. That space between now and not yet. When we say, Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. There is chora. That time in between.

The Stoics in the 1600's regarded history as circular. 'They thought that every 300 years, the world would be consumed by fire and destruction. Then history began again and repeated itself all over again. History went no where and humankind -as it were – were going around on some eternal treadmill.'<sup>i</sup>

Christians on the other hand have never thought that we were only hamsters on wheels running after our tails and time constantly. For Christians, history is directional...it has an end goal. The end goal, of course is Jesus will be once and for all, Lord of all. Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.

Therefore, we are to never despair of our current situation whatever that might be! We live in a permanent state of expectation and waiting and watching. We are living in-between.

The first required class in seminary of every student, when I began, was 'Knowing your Context.' Know the context of your congregation, your community, your city, and so on. We discussed how in previous decades on Sunday mornings, every garage door went up because everyone went to church.

Now, that is simply not true. Sure, garage doors open, but people are going here and there, some to church and some to whatever else they might choose to be about. In fact, if you and I could get into our neighbors heads, some of them might be thinking about us... 'Why do they continue to go to church, anyway? What does religion have anything to do with a real life? God doesn't change anything, the way I see it.'

By the way, those are the neighbors we especially could invite on Christmas Eve!

Reality is, that we are not so different from Jesus' followers of early days. They expected that He would return again in their lifetimes. They never doubted God's return. So as leather making continued, bread baking continued, taxes, growing crops, tending herds, pottery, woodwork all continued, there were those who began to wonder why any logical person would still believe in Jesus.<sup>ii</sup>

Which is why Jesus says, 'Do not let your hearts be weighed down by drunkenness and the worries of this life. Hold on. Keep waiting expectantly regardless of what you see around you.'

If the goal for we who follow the Lord is to see Him again one day, face to face, then our hope is set on that reality. And making it a reality for others as well, even if they do not yet believe or understand our ways.

The earth tells us that hope comes in seasons, like when the buds will appear next spring. Yet my Christmas cactus is blooming right now. This lovely plant is supposed to bloom twice a year at Christmas and Easter. Well my plant has a timing disorder and it blooms at Thanksgiving and Lent. I keep wondering if I need to send it to a therapist.

But then I realized my cactus has the lesson we need to hear today. Today is the day to bloom for today is a day for hope in God. Today is the day to look forward. Let us stand up in hope for Christ's coming. Luke says it like this. 'When these in between things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, your redemption is drawing near.' (21:28) My cactus is standing up, just blooming its head off.

Hope is about holding space – that space in-between our current reality and the reality to come. So we hold space. You know how to do this. We hold space when our spouse or friend wants to have an important conversation. You sit down and take time. You listen. Your attention is focused and undistracted because you know that it's very important to be present now. You are holding that special and sacred space between words and hearts.

God has promised to come again. Until that time comes, we must help hold the space. As Christ's representatives, we take a hopeful stance. These days are incredibly important days to hold a hopeful attitude. Hope dances through the rubble of a war torn street. Hope sings in the cemetery. She holds the dying baby and tells him how much God loves little ones. Hope plants bulbs in the fall trusting they will burst through God's dark soil in the spring. Hope knows that life is fragile. She is a realist. But hope also calls us to action because that is what keeps her strong. And hope lives with God in her front pocket. God is always around her, whispering, 'I am.' 'I will.' 'I promise.'

As we proceed into Advent, I'm inviting all of us to an exercise. Make yourself an Advent calendar. Each day instead of marking off one more day until Christmas and stressing about all there is to do...mark off each day when you can help someone hold space, or help someone else in God's world have hope.

Because we are here during the in-between time.

Christ has died. Christ has risen. **Christ will come again!** AMEN

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<sup>i</sup> The Gospel of Luke. William Barclay. Westminster Press. PA. 1956. Pg 272

<sup>ii</sup> Luke for Everyone. N.T.Wright. Westminster John Knox Press.Louisville, KY.2004. Pg 258