

Signs

First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2006

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Luke 21:25- 36

'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. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 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, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

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

'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, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 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

Prayer.

The signs described by our gospel author are more than mere roadside sentinels warning approaching motorist of upcoming danger, peril, or hazard.

The signs spoken of by Jesus will rock the cosmos.

Signs in the sun!

Signs in the moon!

Signs in the stars!

Signs in the heavens!

All of creation will begin to sing.

The whole universe will react

to the Divine initiative

as if a switch were thrown

by an unseen hand.

An inter- galactic, cosmic revolution is at hand!

Pay attention to the sign.

If only it was that easy.

It is easier said than done.

Every generation since the time of Jesus has looked for the signs, just as he told us to.

But, what exactly are we looking for?

And, how will we know it when we see it?

Will there be shooting stars?

Will the moon turn orange or black?

Will the sun cease to shine?

Will the heavens be shaken

like a damp salt shaker?

For me, I am not satisfied

with the shallow assurance

of a seminary professor

or parish pastor saying:

"You'll know it when you see it."

Pay attention to the sign;

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the roaring of the sea and the waves.
In the two thousand year gap
between when Jesus spoke
and where we are today,
there have been countless
- countless -
hurricanes, storms, tsunamis, typhoons, and
catastrophes;
some big
some small
each, however, worthy
of commanding the attention
of those who were vigilant;
each causing
the faithful disciples of Jesus
to wonder,
“is this the sign we are seeking?”

Pay attention to the sign;
People will faint from fear and foreboding.
As people stampede for sales,
camp out in wind and rain for days
with hopes of eBay dancing in their heads,
shove their way
butting ahead of the line
stealing the last parking place
with a squeal of the tires,
even the most faithful can't help but wonder,
can't help but be tempted,
can't help relegating,
this Advent and holiday season
to just another year
of commercialism and dysfunctional society.
“Where are the ones fainting from fear and
foreboding?”
we ask
with diminished hope and expectation
that no matter what we do
probably won't make a difference anyway.
Well, Hal-leh- jingle- bell- freaking- lu- la.

On this first Sunday of Advent
let us pause and take a step back;
look to John crying in the wilderness
and a baby born in a manger, for,
there was no room in the inn.
Take a step back;

2

listen to the heart's inner desire
the movement that causes us to participate
in pageant and cantata
to read about light and Word
to stand and hold a candle while singing
“Silent Night.”
Take a step back;
look beyond the twenty- fifth.
Look to the day
when you will cross the great divide
arrive at heaven's far shore
look back upon a completed earthly life
and look forward to see the Savior's face.

Pay attention to the sign.
Each sign points to the way
each sign an intentional effort for our compli-
ance
each sign a proven, successful strategy
given as a gift
free and clear
to you and me.

Jesus plants three signs
for our benefit
this holy day.

First,
remove the weight from your heart.
Listen to his words:
“Be on guard so that your hearts
are not weighed down
with dissipation
and drunkenness
and the worries of this life.”
In simpler words,
watch!
wait!
do not allow your attention to be stolen!
do not allow alcohol or drugs to snow you!
do not allow anxiety to overcome you!
do not worry about the things you can not
change;
worry only over one thing –
remaining focused
on Christ and his kingdom.

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The second sign
is simply this: pray for strength!
Jesus tells his followers to pray,
“that you may have the strength
to escape all these things
that will take place,
and to stand before the Son of Man.”
Money won’t make you strong.
Toys and things won’t make you strong.
Strength only comes from faith
and from the Lord above.
Pray for strength,
not success.
Our success or failure
is not our concern or consideration.
A life built upon the solid rock
of Jesus Christ
is more than sufficient
strength
for that inevitable day
when each of us will stand before the Son of
Man.

Third, and finally,
Jesus tells us to
“stand up
and raise your heads,
because your redemption is drawing near.”
Not one of us are going to take it sitting
down!
Stand up and look,
lift your face.
Lift your countenance
with an attitude of expectation
that this is the day.
This is the day!
This is the hour!
This is the moment!
This is not only the day the Lord has made;
this is the day when the Son of Man returns.
This is the time when we are redeemed;
stolen from Satan’s grasp
and delivered before
a loving God
known and feared as judge,
but embraced by those who know him
as Savior.

Unburden the heart.
Pray for strength.
Stand up, look up,
be on guard.
Behold,
Christ has come
Christ is come
and Christ will come again.
Amen.