*Will “Soon” Ever Come?*

A Meditation on Luke 21: 25 – 36

**First Sunday of Advent**

Rev. Cathy C. Hoop        Grace Presbyterian Church         November 28, 2021

Today we begin our Advent journey home, and though we are scattered across incredible distances, we will all arrive home together, home to God as God comes to us clothed in human form. Our travels will be unique, for though the roads carry us to the same home, we travel them differently.

Some of us are anxious about making the trip, much preferring not to wander. Others are worried about traveling unknown roads. The Bible can be as confusing as Google Maps when traveling on back roads. You’re not sure what to trust and you worry that you’ve been this way before.

Some of you may remember a story I told about my first trip back to Nashville after moving to T-town. It was bittersweet. It was home but it wasn’t home, having sold the house in which we had raised our sons. In those few days, everywhere I went – on a hiking trail, at a sushi restaurant, I ran into people in Alabama garb or overheard people talking about Bama. That’s not really much of a shock, I know. But I had never paid attention before to all the Alabama fans in Tennessee. For me, on that first trip back, they were reminders that our home is with us, our home is with God. (Home is not so much a *place*).

So once again, as I saw Nashville disappearing in my rearview mirror yesterday morning, I felt that twinge of sadness, that twinge that comes when you have to say goodbye to those you love. I waited to get well beyond Nashville, where the gas prices drop, before exiting the interstate. Somewhere south of Nashville, at a random gas station, I get out to fill up my car, and I hear a voice from the next pump. The man across the way wanted to say hello to my bulldog “Lily.” As nice as it is to have someone compliment your fur baby, it was his clothing that got me. Yes, he had on an Alabama sweatshirt. “Roll Tide!” I offered as a “goodbye.”

I could have stopped at any number of gas stations. I stopped at that one, next to an Alabama fan. I never anticipated discovering a spirituality within a team logo, but there it is. That crimson “A” that seems to appear whenever I am in Tennessee – or even Michigan – or yes, the Holy Land – that reminder that home is within us. Home is not a place.

God’s people have embodied this truth. God’s so often nomadic people. Carrying their homes with them. Losing homes, fleeing homes, building new ones. Living in borrowed ones. Birthed in strange ones.

We look to our homes to be places of shelter, of safety, but we know that is not always the case. Terrible things happen and homes are lost completely, or sometimes they are damaged by the things that take place within their walls. Some of our homes have been witness to violence, despair, death. Sometimes they are places to flee rather than to seek out. Homes made by human hands can only do so much for us.

Advent is the call to a different home – the call to come home to the nearness of God.

Which doesn’t sound like what this text is about…this text which sounds so familiar, since we basically heard Mark’s version of it two weeks ago. Two weeks ago, we were closing out the church year, preparing for a new beginning. Now as these strange scenes are presented to us again, we live in the hope of Advent’s promise, God incarnate.

It may help to remember that these things that Jesus is telling them are going to happen, are actually things that had happened by the time they were written down.

*There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.**People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.*

Words that were true then. Words that are true now. Could that be the point of all this? Nothing has really changed. The world is constantly at a state of unrest, some seasons worse than others. Wars, pandemics, ecological crises. Sometimes the chaos is not right outside the door, as we experience it now, but none of this is new. Even as Jesus says to watch these signs, I’m not sure that any of us could really distinguish the “real” signs from any other so-called signs.

So is the point to pay attention…always. If we aren’t paying attention, we have no ability to respond to what is happening. If we do not respond with compassion and companionship to the turmoil around us, then how can we claim to walk in Jesus’ way?

We watch and respond. Hear also what Jesus says about these signs. We are not only to watch the skies, we are to watch the world at our feet where symbols of hope are budding around us. “Look at the fig tree,” Jesus says. “Look at all the trees. When they leaf out, you know that summer is coming.”  That is not a symbol of death, but of life, new life. Just as Mark gave us the image of childbirth, Luke offers us the image of the growing tree. The comfort of new life is emerging despite everything else that is happening.

So what signs do we watch and which ones point us home to God? The frightening ones that cause us to faint or the gentle ones that offer hope? We watch them all. We draw strength from the images of new life, empowering us to respond with compassion to the world around us.

As we listen to these words that were spoken to the early Christian community, can we imagine how bereft they felt? Jesus no longer beside them to show them the way, the Temple in ruins. No revolution against Roman oppression had taken place. The gospel writer says to them, “pull yourselves together!” “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life…”

Sounds as if the temptations that invite us to numb our pain, numb our fear were also the temptations they knew. I can’t remember the last time I heard the word, “carousing,” but we all have chosen ways to block out pain. We console our fears with food or wine or recreational drugs. We ignore the pain as we make impulse purchases, indulge in retail therapy. We binge on Netflix or Facebook or Tik Tok. We work too much or work out too much or volunteer too much, filling every moment so that we just don’t have to face our fears, so we don’t have to pay attention to our souls. Or worrying becomes our everything…

And the gospel writer says to us, “stop.” “Stop, or your hearts will become weighed down by these things.”

Here’s good news: while we say that we are on an Advent journey, drawing closer to home, the truth is that God is drawing near to us.

So maybe, as God journeys to us, as God brings home to us this Advent season, the question we need to ask ourselves is this: what signs have captured my focus? What receives my attention? Do I need to seek balance?

As Jesus’ followers, we cannot ignore the signs – our neighbors crying out to be heard, crying out for justice. We cannot ignore the plight of the earth. We listen, and respond in hope, we embody God’s hope in this world. And we remind one another that we are only traveling through. This world is not, will never be our home. So let us journey together, trusting that wherever God is we are already at home.

Thanks be to God, who draws nearer to us with every breath. Amen.

**Sources Consulted:**

·       A Sanctified Art, Closer to Home worship series

·       Working Preacher (Workingpreacher.org)

·       Pulpit Fiction ([Advent 1C — Pulpit Fiction](https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/advent1c/#Luke21%3A25-36=))