

# December 5-6, 2009

## Advent 2

### Luke 21:25-36

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We know the end is coming. It is not a surprise. We can see the signs. We ought to be able to read them. Wars, perplexity, men's hearts failing for fear, violence, the demise of the family, natural disasters, the extinction of species, and pollution: all show the disintegration of creation. Sin has taken its toll. Nothing is free of Adam's inheritance. The world is falling apart in front of us. We should look upon the cemeteries like rising thermometers. Every burial is a sign of the end. This can't and won't go on forever. We do not know the exact day or hour. But we know it is inevitable. We know it is coming. Repent.

The signs are terrible. They are themselves dangerous to faith. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things. For contrary to the popular saying, there are plenty of atheists in foxholes. Foxholes don't convert to Christianity. They recruit atheists. Because the most difficult place to believe in the goodness of God, in His providence and care, is in the midst of evil and chaos. War, like unto divorce, death, and illness, is evil. It recruits for the devil. So watch and pray. Because the more evil you have to endure, the more your faith is tested and the more danger you are in.

But rejoice in this: the end is coming. Your salvation has been won. And no temptation has overtaken you except that which is common to man. God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. But with the temptation He will also make the way of escape. You will be able to bear it. He will not forget you. He will not abandon you. He will use temptation, even war, divorce, death, and illness, all the signs of the coming end, for your good. For by them He will purify you with fire. He will teach you to rely upon Him. He will make you weak, for in weakness, in dependent, desperate faith, you are strong. He will show Himself in the foxhole to be your only Help, Hope, and Savior.

Now, the servant is not above his Master. This weakness, this end-time sorrow, suffering, and danger, is the way of the cross. It is the Lord's Way. He brings you into it out of mercy. You don't get to Easter without Good Friday. He knows what is good for you. And though it seems almost cruel to our weak minds, He afflicts you on purpose. He gives you custom-built crosses, designed for your strengths and weaknesses. All of them are opportunities. In the midst of war, He calls soldiers to do good, to show mercy, and to witness to the hope that is in them. In the midst of divorce, He calls us to reconcile and to forgive. In the midst of illness and death, He calls us to stand before the grave and mock the devil with St. Paul's words, "**O Death where is thy sting?**" This doesn't mean soldiers don't kill, that the divorced must re-marry the original spouses, or that we shouldn't bury the dead. It simply means that we proclaim the death of Jesus Christ for the life of the world and our hope for the future in the midst of our sorrows and the brokenness of the world. We confess the love of God in Christ in the foxhole.

Look around you, O Christian. *Do you think you are alone in your suffering? Do you think your crosses are heavier than those of your brothers and sisters?* Repent. They are not. No one gets off easy. Do not think the man who is only juggling 3 or 4 balls has it easier than you. He may only have one arm. We know little of what hidden struggles our brothers and sisters endure. Mental illness, ill health, an abusive past, a secret addiction, a mean husband, disobedient children, and the like are all sadly common.

Here is what we know: nothing has overtaken you except that which is common to man. You have not been singled out. Look upon your brothers and sisters with sympathy. They are all hurting, the same as you. If it seems to you that they have it easy, you are wrong. No one has it easy. The crosses are custom-made. What would be easy for you is not easy for them, and what is hard for you would be easy for them. Each of us is

called according to his own gifts and talents, and each call is same: be faithful, remember the coming Day of the Lord, live by grace and do not judge one another. Love one another. Comfort one another. Encourage one another.

The Kingdom of God is near. The Lord Jesus Christ, who has given His Life for you, does not ask you to endure these things forever or alone. He has placed you in a family, in the Church. He has given the mutual consolation of the brethren. Your sorrow will pass away. You have not yet suffered to the point of bloodshed, but even if you do, you will not do it alone. And in the midst of your trials, you have had joy. You have had glimpses of heaven, little tastes of what is to come. But you live not by those fleeting things, though you are rightly thankful for them when they are given. You live by every Word that proceeds from the Mouth of God. Because He will not pass away. He will not change. He will not fail. Your feelings, your intellect, your experience; your family, your friends, your church; your love, your faith, your good works: will all fail. But the promises of God in Christ Jesus will never fail, never lie, never stop. Heaven, as well as earth, will pass away. But the Word of the Lord, Jesus Christ, endures forever.

The Lord has come to earth as a Man, to be a Sacrifice, on your behalf. He has died in your place. He has proclaimed you His heir and claimed you by name in the waters of Holy Baptism. He has forgiven your sins and declared you righteous, holy, innocent. He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven as your Advocate and Pathfinder. He is coming back and He will bring you home. He will not fail. Lift up your heads. You are not alone. You have brothers and sisters. Lift up your heads further: the Lord comes. You will never be alone. Be neither afraid or sad. Your redemption draws near.

In the meantime, in the midst of war, divorce, illness, and sorrow, burdened by guilt, shame, and regret, the Lord comes to you as He has promised in Holy Word and Sacrament. You are not alone. You have not merely your fellow, suffering bond-servants, you have the Lord. He is your Lord. He comes to speak words of warning and comfort to you. He comes to feed your body and soul with His Body and Blood that you would be strengthened for the times and trials to come, that you would have joy while you wait and while you suffer. For He is not simply your Lord in the future, when sorrows shall cease, but He is also your Lord now, even in the midst of sorrow.

So you will escape these things in the end. He will bring you to Himself. Your redemption draws near. In ✠ Jesus' Name. Amen.