

ADVENT WEEK 1:

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 the Son of Man.'

SERMON

According to Bruce Feiler¹, author of “Life Is in the Transitions: Mastering Change at Any Age,” on average, everyone goes through a disruptive event every 12 to 18 months - the transitions of kids into elementary school; getting a new pet. One in ten of these are major changes Feiler calls “lifequakes,” - more than half of which are out of our control, such as a sudden illness stopping us in our tracks, or who wins an election. We choose nearly half of them - like moving or changing careers.

At any given time, we’re either headed into, in the midst of, or coming out of a transition. How to find our way in the midst of so much change?

I want to tell you about Roger - he grew up spending his summers on the coast of Maine. He loved the coast and time on the water. He saved up his money and bought his first boat before his first car. When still a teenager, one sunny Saturday afternoon Roger headed out on the ocean with 3 of his friends.

All of a sudden, with no warning, a dense blanket of fog rolled in - so thick he couldn’t see his hand in front of his face.

He was terrified. All he wanted to do was put the boat in high gear and get home as fast as he could. The problem was, it was neither safe nor effective to do so. This was pre-GPS and cell phone. And Roger realized he had left the most important tool at home - a compass.

What he did, instead of hightailing it out of there, was - he stopped, cut the engine, and listened. He knew that in coastal communities such as his, there is an alternative set of navigational tools that are sound based. They’re set in different locations along the coast, and each one sounds different. When Roger stopped and listened, he was listening for the various sounds around him. He was quite literally listening for the sound of his home harbor.

Roger had left home without his compass - that most important navigational tool. But he had another kind of compass - an inner one. He had honed the skills to slow down, to listen to the sounds that showed him the way, and to take the next step.

Roger and his friends made it home that day. Repeating the process of stopping, cutting the engine and listening for signals, making their way forward, bit by bit.

We know change, change that moves in swiftly like a blanket of fog, change we can do little to control - the worsening climate crisis, deepening divisions, rising inequality. These realities weigh on us, and in their shadow, hope, the hope this Advent season invites us to, can feel hard to hold onto.

But maybe that’s because we’ve misunderstood hope. Hope isn’t blind optimism - gunning the engine in the midst of dense fog, thinking you’ll make it home safely. It’s not spiritual bypassing—ignoring the difficulties in front of us or avoiding the work we need to do.

¹ [Hidden work of Leadership](#)

Real hope is more grounded than that. It's not about denying the dire truths we face but finding the courage to act in the face of them.

Hope is a compass.

Our scripture today doesn't feel very hope filled, doesn't feel very Adventy - Jesus is speaking here in his final days -he's arrived in Jerusalem, the passover will start soon, and he gives a long, apocalyptic speech, which we heard the end of.

Every year, Advent calls us to practice the apocalypse: to look for the presence of Christ who enters into our times of dense fog - enters into every loss, who comes to us in the midst of devastation, and who offers the healing that is a foretaste of the wholeness he is working to bring about not only at the end of time but also in this time, in this place. This is the hope we are called to practice this season.²

Jesus tells his listeners: "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..."

Signs that confuse and distress them, on land and sea. What compass is there to help them find their way?

Our scripture today urges the listener to train their ear to move back and forth - hearing the suffering of the earth and the promises of heaven. Don't ignore the suffering, AND don't allow the worries of this life to trap you.³

Don't ignore it and don't get trapped in the woes. Jesus, as he is in his own last days, seems to be speaking of a kind of hope that says, *Yes, the challenges are immense, suffering is coming. Pay attention to what guides your hope.*

Poet and teacher Joanna Macy⁴ describes this kind of hope as "*Active Hope.*" She writes, "*Active Hope is a practice. Like gardening, like (yoga, it is something we do rather than have. It is a process we can apply to any situation*".

Like Roger cutting his engine to listen for the next harbor bell, getting his bearings, and moving towards home based on that sound. *That's active hope - moving forward, through the fog, bit by bit.*

² Jan Richardson. [The Advent Door](#)

³ Chakoian, Christine, 2014, in *Feasting on the Gospels*, Luke, Vol 2. Westminster John Knox Press.

⁴ Piloting Faith by Rev. Cameron Trimble "Hope beyond the headlines" 11/26/24

Jesus embodied this kind of hope. His inner compass - his connection to God and his mission of bringing a love that saves - that kept him moving forward, no matter how dark and dense the troubles that surrounded him.

Be alert Jesus tells them, tells us - be alert, praying that you may have strength - he doesn't suggest that God will provide an escape from suffering; but neither does he say God will cause it. Instead, Jesus provides a vision for believers to watch and listen for both the woe and the redemption here and still to come.

Advent calls us to practice hope. To look for the presence of Christ who comes to us in the midst of change, and who offers the healing that is a foretaste of the wholeness he is working to bring about not only at the end of time but also here, now.

This is the hope we are called to practice this season. Looking for signs of light; sharing love with those who sit in darkness; by holding the compass of Christ to show us the way.

How might you practice hope?

END SERMON with song

Confession:

Practicing hope invites us to name the ways we have lost our way. The places of dense fog and darkness where we struggle to see the stars.

Leader: O God, you search us out and know us,
and all that we are is open to you.

We confess that we have sinned: (PAUSE)

In your mercy, Lord,

People: forgive us and heal us.

Leader: When we scoff at those who await your return,
and live as though you were never here: (PAUSE)

In your mercy, Lord,

People: forgive us and heal us.

Leader: When we long for your coming to change the world,

and yet are unwilling to change even our own hearts: (PAUSE)

In your mercy, Lord,

People: forgive us and heal us.

Leader: When we do not make straight paths for justice,
nor offer a welcome when you come as a stranger: (PAUSE)

In your mercy, Lord,

People: forgive us and heal us.

Leader: When we dismiss prophets and angels
and refuse to nourish your seed within us: (PAUSE)

In your mercy, Lord,

People: forgive us and heal us.

Leader: When we reduce our preparation for your coming
to reckless expense and trivialities: (PAUSE)

In your mercy, Lord,

People: forgive us and heal us.

ALL: We turn to you,

O God of infinite mercy;

We renounce evil;

We claim your love;

We choose to be made whole.

Amen.

COMMUNION:

The season of Advent is upon us -

The word Advent is from the Latin *adventus* (arrival) - we await the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. Advent reminds us of the growing light of God's presence, even and especially in the uncertainty and shadows of despair, conflict, sorrow and hate.

We prepare for the arrival of the Light, the One who calls us to Love and we move to the table - the feast that Jesus invites us to again and again.

Our scripture reading today has a Jesus that speaks of a time to come - speaks in words that challenge and sometimes confuse us. What do they mean? Who is this Jesus who speaks such things?

From Mink River:

"There are some things about even the people you love the best and deepest that you will never know. That's just how it is...But I believe it is an error to wonder about what you do not know, at the expense of savoring the excellence of what you do know." (p. 303)

"It's an error to wonder about what you do not know, at the expense of savoring the excellence of what you do know."

We know that Jesus calls us to enter into the kingdom here - the table where all are welcomed. The table where we, the guests, are invited to come just as we are.

Instructions:

GLUTEN free bread available.

take the bread, savor it, be nourished by it, and save a piece to eat together.

Call the communion servers forward

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread, blessed it...

After communion

End with LORDS PRAYER