

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



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Rooted in the Reformed tradition, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is committed to the formation of women and men for theologically reflective ministry and to scholarship in service to the global Church of Jesus Christ.

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World Mission Initiative

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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 8, 2018

SCRIPTURE

LUKE 21:5-19

5 When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, 6 “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” 7 They asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?” 8 And he said, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them. 9 When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end will not follow immediately.” 10 Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11 there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven. 12 But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. 13 This will give you an opportunity to testify. 14 So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; 15 for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. 16 You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. 17 You will be hated by all because of my name. 18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By your endurance you will gain your souls.”

DEVOTIONAL

The Rev. Kendra Buckwalter Smith '12/'13, Director, Worship Program

If we read this passage as a prediction of final judgment, we'd be hard pressed not to think that we're currently facing the end times. Fighting between and within nations, refugee crises, ecological crises, natural disasters that strip people of their homes and loved ones, stories of abuse and of corrupt leadership, and ongoing persecution, oppression, and injustice all prompt panic and fear. And these words of warning from Luke's Gospel might tempt us to interpret all these realities accordingly. Yet Jesus says, “do not be terrified.” Jesus invites us to trust that he remains present in our lives and faithful to his promises, even when we face the most challenging of circumstances.

Rather than offering a prediction of future judgment, Jesus is describing the truth of the world in the present. It is a lamentable truth in that the world is not yet as God desires it to be. But it is also a hopeful and comforting truth in that God's desires for the world are coming to be through Jesus' present work. And we are invited to participate in this work as, in the midst of all the brokenness, Jesus gives us “words and a wisdom that none of [our] opponents will be able to withstand or contradict” (verse 15).

And so it is that we discover that Jesus' words here are not words of warning, but words of assurance. In the midst of a broken, divided, quarreling, uncertain world, Christ is at work—gathering, baptizing, communing, healing—and thereby making visible God's inbreaking Kingdom. It is a message of comfort and hope in Jesus' abiding presence and active reign even in the midst of the inevitable calamities and injustices we face.

In this time of Advent expectation, we are again reminded that we live betwixt and between. We cannot deny that we experience a world of destruction and pain. Yet God has chosen to bend down into that experience; therefore, let us fix our gaze on our coming Lord's present work, and let us trust that he is giving us the words and a wisdom to testify to that work in a hurting world that God so loves.

PRAYER

Gracious God, there is so much in this world that causes us to cry out in fear and sorrow. Help us to trust in your promise to wipe away every tear in the time when there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. In the meantime, train our eyes to see Christ's loving and transforming presence in our midst. And give us boldness to testify to that presence. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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