

Advent Devotional December 7, 2020

Scripture

Luke 21:20-28

20 "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. 21 Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; 22 for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. 23 Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; 24 they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 25 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. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Devotional

Samuel McCann '19

What a distressing passage. Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem. He also promises to return—something we might cheerfully cling to—but even it is dressed in foreboding language. As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ as a baby—a story that often evokes serene images of the holy family—we might ask “Why this text? And why now?”

Despite all the horrific imagery, this passage ends by insisting it is good news. “Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Jesus is communicating to his disciples that he knows the coming afflictions and trials they will face. He is saying that he knows the suffering that will be visited upon the people of Jerusalem. His knowledge of this suffering yet to come is intended to assure the disciples that even the sinfulness of this world cannot frustrate his plans to redeem it. The disciples are called to trust the Lord during difficult circumstances.

In turn, we are called to trust Christ as the disciples trusted him. Our faith is not grounded in escapism. We are not drawn into a story that makes us forget the world for a while; rather, the gospel confronts our sinfulness. And integral to the coming judgment is the promise that Christ will shake the very foundations that allow sin and suffering to persist.

This judgment might not always be easy and cheerful, but it is grounded in the hope that the One who judges us is intimately aware of the ways we are plagued by the brokenness of this world. We can trust, then, that the world’s shaking constitutes the last gasp of rebellion, the failed attempt of sin and death ultimately to rule our lives. It is in the midst of the shaking that Christ is building the kingdom to come, where we may behold him in all his glory.

Prayer

Lord, knowing that you know our struggles, we entrust our lives to you. Knowing that you will redeem us from the pitfalls and snares that trap and entangle us, we entrust our lives to you. Knowing that you shake the foundations of the world to redeem us, we entrust our lives to you. Amen.