

Advent Devotional December 11, 2021

Scripture

Matthew 24:1-14

1 As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. 2 Then he asked them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" 4 Jesus answered them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: 8 all this is but the beginning of the birthpangs.

9 "Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. 10 Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 14 And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come."

Devotional

The Rev. Lawrence James Lalama '93

During the liturgical season of Advent, we are encouraged to reflect on a multitude of themes: anticipation and expectancy; preparation and readiness; hope and peace; joy and love. These themes inform and infuse both our spiritual and physical practices in the days leading up to the celebration of the first coming of Jesus Christ.

Another theme which is brought into the light of our self-examination, yet is lesser welcomed into our Advent devotional praxes, is that of Jesus' so-called "second coming," the apocalyptic aspect of Advent. Generally, the first Sunday of Advent invites us to consider this *parousia* of Jesus which will mark the end of the age his first coming ushered in. The gospel lesson today from Matthew features Jesus speaking to his disciples of this very thing.

In the passage, Jesus is leaving the temple courts following a very contentious encounter with the religious leaders. His recent triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his populous support have greatly intensified their opposition to his mission. On the heels of his woeful indictments leveled against the scribes and Pharisees and his passionate lament over Jerusalem, the disciples can only marvel at the scope and grandeur of the temple, encouraging Jesus to do the same. His reaction is sharp and instructive.

In a private moment later, outside the walls of the city and out of the temple's shadow, the disciples need to know more. Their questions of when the temple's destruction would come to pass compel Jesus' sober assessment of the period between his first and second appearances. The very themes we incorporate into our Advent preparation and practice are fundamental to Jesus' discourse and parables,

both in this passage and beyond: anticipation of his return; expectancy and joy of his appearance in power and great glory in the midst of the world's chaos; hope of being found in a state of readiness, esteemed trustworthy, and ultimately rewarded for good and faithful servanthood and love to others.

So this multitude of themes bridge the gap, in a manner of speaking, between the already and not yet; between the first and second comings of Jesus. Jesus, however, offers no false expectation that this time between would be a time of ease and casual observation. Rather, it would be a time marked by tribulation, trial, opposition, deception, hatred, sacrifice, and endurance, the very things with which Jesus was confronted in his incarnated life. And these are the very things we face in the life of our incarnated communities of faith in the midst of this, our 2021 Advent journey.

So perhaps this season we might offer a greater welcome to Advent's apocalyptic aspect. It calls us to less fascination with the worldly glitz and glitter and to more sober reflection upon spiritual preparation and readiness for the not-yet second advent of Jesus Christ, which will usher in a new and glorious age. In this waiting time, Jesus counsels us to not be alarmed, but to be expectant; not to be anxious, but to be steady; not to be foolishly led astray, but to be wisely discerning the times, all the while praying for endurance and confident that the good news of the Kingdom, now proclaimed, will be all in all.

In that spirit, we add to the proclamation, *"Come, Lord Jesus!"*

Prayer

Lord our God, help us to be faithful in our preparation, honest in our assessments, wise in our judgment, zealous in our service, and confident in the promise of Jesus' return in power and glory. Help us to cast our vision forward and upward to that day when all is fulfilled in your new heaven and earth. This we pray in the name of Jesus, whose birth we celebrate and whose return we anticipate. Amen.