

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 28, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Luke 21:25-36

This reading of the coming of the Son of Man (the second coming) reminds the listener that Christmas is not just a time to remember what God has done but is a call to be ready for what God will do. While most did not expect the Messiah to come in a manger in Bethlehem, Jesus warns his disciples that there will be signs so be ready. Advent, a time of waiting, is a period to remind everyone that the Day of our Lord will come. The Body of Christ is to wait with expectation and not become distracted by the traditions and grind of the world.

Luke 21:34 Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down

Do we get so busy that we miss the little things?

When do things slip your mind or you “miss” things?

Is it during times of stress (physical, mental, emotional)?

What weighs down your heart?

How might your faith help lighten your heart?

Commentary on Jeremiah 33:14-16

The Babylonian captivity of Judah took place in two stages, 597 and 586. At first, the leading citizens and those who could form an army were taken and a puppet leader was installed as a vassal state. In Chapter 29, Jeremiah sends a letter to Babylon telling those that their exile would not be ending soon. In the next two chapters, the LORD assures Jeremiah that eventually God will bring back everyone and write a new covenant on their hearts (31:33-34). As a sign of this promise in Chapter 32 Jeremiah purchases land as a witness that the people would one day return. Unlike the leaders of the day, in this section the LORD promises that a righteous leader will arise to bring the people home. Verses 15 and 16 repeat the promise made in 23:5-6 after the LORD says that God be their good shepherd and would gather the people like a flock back to the land (23:1-4). Unfortunately, in the following chapters after 33, Judah breaks the covenant, Jeremiah is soon imprisoned and the rest will be taken to Babylon.

Jeremiah 33:16 "The LORD is our righteousness."

What is righteousness?

What does it mean that Jesus is our righteousness?

Is this why we are saved by faith in Jesus rather than our own works?

How does faith in Jesus change your actions and thoughts?

Does your actions or thoughts reflect your faith to others?

Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

If God is indeed love, then a heart consecrated to God is a heart filled with love. Holiness, therefore, is the process by which God's grace replaces our love for things and self with a love focused on God. As our love for God grows, we begin to love those whom God loves. Paul encourages those in Thessalonica to “increase and abound in love to one another and to all” because of the love overflowing in their hearts through holiness. We will be judged not for the righteousness of our actions but the holiness of love in our hearts. It is from that holiness begun and perfected by grace from which a righteousness grows.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all
How can we love “all”?

Can Jesus' love for all change how you love?
How does the Lord increase your love?
In what ways do others experience the love of God in Jesus through you?

Reflection on Luke 21:25-36, Jeremiah 33:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Sermon "Heavy Hearts"

Like Martha in the story of Mary and Martha in Luke, we are often distracted and busy with so many things when there is only one thing necessary (Luke 10:40). Jesus warns us that all of these distractions and busyness can weigh down our hearts and blind us to what is going on around us. How many times have you been distracted in the car and missed your exit? Or, have you ever been so tired or burdened that you arrive at your destination but can't remember the trip? A heart filled with stress and worry distorts how we view our world and our life. This is especially true during the holidays when expectations and lists of things to do can feel overwhelming. Like Martha, we are so busy doing that we miss what is happening right in front of us.

Our faith proclaims that Jesus will return. The question we ask ourselves every Advent is "Are we so busy that we will not be ready?". Reflecting upon the first coming that Christmas in Bethlehem, we have to wonder if people were so worried about themselves that no one was willing to give up their room for a woman who was obviously in distress. Where was their compassion? Do we sometimes become so heavyhearted that we cannot see before our own immediate problems and tasks? Jesus calls us to look up from our burdens and await his coming. If we pay attention to what God is doing, there will be indications that Jesus is coming soon. All we have to do is let go of our worries.

Letting go is incredibly difficult if you feel that nothing will get done without you. When the burdens of the world seem to rest on our shoulders, we feel guilt if something doesn't get done. We can feel like the person who spins plates on poles running from pole to pole making sure the plates don't fall. Our plates may be children or jobs or relationships but we all at times feel like there are too many plates to spin. If a plate falls, we feel like we have let someone down and fear the consequences. Some people escape into denial or distractions so that they don't have to face the guilt while others avoid spinning any plates. All of this points to one underlying problem – we think and act like we are God. Jeremiah reminds us that the LORD is our righteousness. Not what we do or what cause we support but the LORD is our righteousness. God is the one who keeps the plates spinning and God calls us to the plates we need to focus on. The only One we ever might let down is God and in Jesus we have been forgiven. If the LORD is our righteousness, then why do we burden our hearts with worries and distractions.

When we live by faith, then we experience a lightness in our hearts. We know that God is in charge and will give us both the strength and resources to face any challenge on the path Jesus leads us down. Free from worries and distractions, our hearts are open to receive the love and grace of God. As Paul tells those in Thessalonica, God will continue to pour love into your life to overflowing for you, your community, and everyone. When we let go of our expectations and self-imposed check lists, we find the holiday season full of unexpected moments of love and joy. We discover that Jesus has come again in the people we meet and the love we experience. When we focus on the one thing necessary, everything else falls into place. It may not be perfect but it will be a memory worth cherishing. This Advent, unburden your heart and let the love of Christ in.