

Out of This World

St. Luke 21:25-36

The tempo is rising and, as unbelievable as it appears, the insane rush of Christmas shopping is getting louder and more physical. This is so because there are only eleven days before Christmas day. It is as if time itself is telescoping, as we run to finish the Christmas cards and letters, get ready for family celebrations, and all the baking that needs to be finished.

I have been guilty in the past of preaching ‘prepare for Christmas’ sermons, where I would encourage parishioners to prioritize their goals during the Advent season. To not find themselves stuck in what St. Luke calls “*the worries of life*,” (V. 34) so that we will actually hear when God speaks to us with richer clarity.

While there is nothing wrong with this approach it simply is not enough, because Advent is about more than preparation. More than planning Christmas get-togethers or arranging for the coming of the Christ child, it is also about realizing that there are two Advents.

One of my patron saints, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, illustrates what I am trying to say: “*The Coming of Jesus into Our Midst*” isn’t just the adorable, meek baby in the manger. We are also waiting in anticipation for the time when God comes to the earth again to reign in peace and righteousness. And this thought – God’s coming reign – should be terrifying, because God’s reign means changes here.”

What I think Dr. Bonhoeffer is saying is that both the Advent of Jesus and his coming again, produces incredible awe, rather than terror. We often read in Holy Scripture that believers are to ‘fear’ God. What we must remember is that a closer translation of the Biblical word for ‘fear’ is ‘awe.’ Picture instead, Moses at the burning bush and Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration, and see how they behaved.

As Emmanuel's coming brought awe, mystery, hope, and praise, so will Jesus' Second Advent, his Second Coming. Praising God is the penultimate pursuit we can accomplish. When we praise God we acknowledge that God our King is on the throne, and our relationship with the Christ Child is what makes real life possible. The Psalmist writes, "*Worship the Lord because he is holy. Praise the Lord for the glory of his name.*"

It is sometimes easy to forget **that amidst** the presents, decorations, and family events, the Christ child is the Lord. The Kingdom of God is not like the false, worldly one we know where, as Lord Acton said, "*Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*" When we live as Jesus' followers in the present Kingdom of God, our lives will change for the good and will continue to do so. We can only imagine the changes that will appear at Jesus' Second Advent.

Jesus came into this sinful world to make it possible for we sinners to establish a dynamic relationship with God. The result of this relationship is a change in our character: We become people of gratitude, kindness, compassion, and love because now we have the correct perspective.

It **is** astonishing that we can understand the gentleness, and the loyalty, and the goodness of God, and not be people of gratitude. When we give food to the poor, it is worship. When we share a word of encouragement with someone who is depressed, it is worship. When we see a need anywhere and meet it, it's an act of worship.

On this third week of Advent, would it be possible for you and me to simply do what is right? No matter what we encounter in our daily lives, the difficulties or setbacks we face, could we just do what is right, even if no one else is making the effort? Could we strive for truth no matter the cost? Can we take a stand for what is right, because God does what is right? God saves us by his grace. With God's help, can we be more honest in everything we do?

The first Advent made it possible for those who are hopeless, to be filled with hope by faith in the Babe of Bethlehem. Today, we live in a world that is corrupted by sin, a world not as God intended it. And, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand how horribly sin has changed this world, physically and spiritually.

The first Advent established the solution for our spiritual life, and the Second Advent will bring a new heaven and a new earth. In this new earth there will be no more death, no more tears, no more want, no more loneliness, no more dishonesty, where you and I will be the creation God originally planned. In the 2nd Advent there will truly be peace on earth. Alleluia. Amen.