



Advent 1, Year C – November 29, 2009

Luke 21.25-36

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Canon M. Ansley Tucker

The days are surely coming, says the Lord...

Now, in the prophecy of Jeremiah, what is coming is the fulfillment of a prophecy to raise up a "righteous branch," from the "stump" of David (the left over poor excuse for a dynasty), so that the people of Judah will once again live in safety.

In Luke's account of the teaching of Jesus, on the contrary, what is coming is distress, confusion, and fear – all the signs of a day of reckoning which will surely arrive.

If Advent is clear about one thing, it is that we sleepers need to wake up! It is that we go about our lives on automatic pilot, as it were, heedless of the little indications here and there that something has changed, blissfully unaware (because we're asleep at the switch) that all hell is about to break loose.

Be on guard, says Jesus. There will be signs. Be alert at all times. Wake up, people. That is the message of Advent. Fittingly it is a season which celebrates the coming of light into darkness, and therefore, we may hope, of daybreak, and our own arousal from slumber.

The days are surely coming says the Lord: the signs are all there, if only you will learn to read them. And if you don't, there will be no escape.

A child picks wings off living flies, delights in putting a match to crawling ants, and graduates to terrorizing cats: at what point does a parent read the signs of escalating violence? Is this really just exuberant play, or are the days surely coming when we will have a sadistic serial killer on our hands?

The polar ice cap recedes. The ozone layer thins. The average global temperature rises. At what point does a society read the signs of environmental degradation? Is this really just a constellation of periodic flukes, or are the days surely coming when the coasts will be flooded with water, and the ecosystem no longer able to sustain life as we have known it?

You've been feeling tired lately. You notice that your ankles are consistently swollen. You are short of breath. You don't like the sound of your cough. At what point do you read the signs of physical illness? Is this just the wages of a poor exercise routine, or are the days surely coming when you will find yourself in your local coronary care unit?

One of the things I think Jesus is saying to us is that there are signs all around us which can be read if only we will wake from sleepy ways, and pay attention to them. And this is true whether we are speaking of our personal health, the shifting morality of our society, carbon emissions, politics, war, the state of our marriage, or the fruitfulness of the earth.

Very little in life comes to us absolutely, completely, irrefutably unannounced. Life is like an Agatha Christie mystery story. When we finally find out "whodunit," we flip back through the novel, and see clue after clue in its stark and obvious reality. We should have known, we chide ourselves.

And Jesus says, Yes, yes, you should. There are signs all around you. Be alert, wake up, look around you, and see. And then, do what you have to do.

Otherwise, I promise you, the days are surely coming...

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