

First Sunday in Advent (c)
Luke 21:25-36
St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City OH
November 28, 2021 (Traditional)

The gospel lesson made me remember the first time I got an allowance from my parents. I bought a six pack of Mountain Dew and drank the whole thing in one day. Jesus is talking about the end of the world and his second coming. And he gives us a warning. He says, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap." He's talking about the day he comes as judge. So there's a real possibility, where instead of being a celebration and a joyful reunion, we might experience the end of this worldly existence as a trap that suddenly closes on us. Jesus warns us against complacency, against turning inward on ourselves and thinking only about this world and our personal needs. Beware of getting all bound up in this world's affairs and worries.

That's what the apostle Paul calls living only for this world. And he says that's pitiable. It's like, I'm built for this beautiful, daily relationship with God where he's filling me up with forgiveness, new life, new surprises, new joy every day. It's a life, a relationship that I'm always growing into. Even the horrible stuff that happens, I can see it in terms of that love relationship I have with my Father in heaven, through my crucified Savior. I'm always discovering things in my relationship with God. That's what I'm made for...that journey. But it's like, sin makes us say, I don't want no stinkin' journey. I don't want to grow. I don't want to learn. I want absolute security and certainty right now. I want complete safety. And I want to have it all now. I want to be complete, final, filled up, done, finished...**now**. So I trade that ongoing life with God, where he's providing me with just what I need every day, for a life where I'm cramming everything in as fast as I can. And what's the result of that life? I feel like I never have enough. Not surprisingly, I'm going to end up empty, because empty is where I started. I might feel a temporary high on some days, a fleeting sense of fulfillment here and there...but it fades within a day.

You think of the Israelites in the desert, while Moses is up on the mountain receiving the ten commandments. They're supposed to wait for Moses to come back with this beautiful gift from God. But instead, they start partying and literally worshiping false gods right there. They can't seem to wait on their Savior God to give them what they need—they want everything right there and then. It's a perfect picture of what the power of sin does to us. Here we are born into this existence with this barrier, this darkness that separates us from our creator. And if we never get to know who our source is, if we don't know who or what is going to provide us with what we need, (of course, as believers we say *if we don't know who **God** is*), if we don't know what or who to trust in our lives, we've got this emptiness in ourselves that we're going to fill with the spiritual equivalent of donuts. We're going to look for life and sustenance in all the wrong places.

And notice how Jesus adds "the worries of this world" to his warning against too much spiritual Mountain Dew ("dissipation and drunkenness.") He's not just talking about overindulgence in quick, obvious pleasures. We actually get addicted to worries and fears, too. I think we're seeing a lot of that right now in the world out there. It's easy to get hooked on the news, hooked on rage, hooked on politics. We gorge ourselves on slime. We develop an addiction to it. I read

an article the other day where the author said that through the pandemic, she and her friends got together every day on Zoom to talk about people they hated—people of the other political persuasion. Can that kind of gorging on negativity be based on anything real that God created in this world? No, that's Satan working from the inside of human beings, and the evil comes oozing out. That's not God's reality; that's about what we want reality to be in order for us to be God. That hatred, that rage, comes out of the same insecurity that made the Israelites unable to wait on God in the wilderness. When so many people are addicted to rage at the same time, when our conversations with people revolve around shared complaints, we should take a second look at ourselves. Aren't we ultimately trying to stop a story that God isn't done writing yet? Isn't it just our way of trying to have the final say? Do we not trust that our Savior God is working his will in the world no matter how messy and ridiculous it gets? Just because we can't understand it and don't like what we see happening doesn't mean that God is no longer doing his thing in the middle of it. But sin makes us stop trusting that. It makes me think that God has abandoned the world. Now he's just on MY side.

You hear Jesus' warning against overindulgence, drunkenness, carousing and the like, and it's easy to think: that's old-school religion. But look at the world we live in right now. Look at the huge changes we're navigating through. It's kind of like me with the Mountain Dew. With our computers, our iphones, the internet...all the immediate satisfactions, the immediate pleasures, the immediate gratification and yes, personal power, they offer. At a family gathering a few years back, I was sitting on a huge sofa with a bunch of my nieces and nephews, and I started laughing when I looked up, because all of us were buried in our iphones, completely isolated in our own worlds. It's like we can cram so much of the world into every moment that it completely pulls us away from what we're built for—a living flesh and blood relationship with God and with each other. Isn't it strange, how having too much of this world can keep us from living fully in this world!

Well, now we've entered this special church season called Advent. You know, Advent is intended to keep us from skipping right to Christmas. It's literally a buffer that someone smarter than us put between us and the big celebration. It's a countdown, and it teaches us that to be human, as God created us, is not to have everything at once. In heaven, in the state of never-ending bliss, it's just going to be one beautiful experience at a time, one beautiful surprise after the next. That's what God in his infinite love built us for. Even heaven is going to be a journey. And Advent is actually a penitential season, it's very much like Lent in this sense—a time when we step back from our lives and think about all those things that are weighing on us, cluttering up our lives, bogging us down in too much at once...all the stuff that is keeping us from our primary purpose as human beings: praising God with all we have.

Jesus points us, in today's gospel towards that final goal of our existence. He is coming. He is our future. This whole world and everything in it is going to be shaken out like an old rug. Everything we put our trust in, everything we put stock in, besides God himself, is going to fall out and die. And if we're holding onto that stuff, we'll go down with it.

But Jesus isn't trying to scare us and make us more concerned about ourselves. He's telling us, when you see all the constant reminders that this world is passing away, stand up and raise your heads. He's telling us, "you have **me**. So never be afraid of the wars and terrorists and haters

and the diseases and the poverty and the terrible heartbreaking things you see all around you. Don't be afraid, even if all those things are coming at you personally. Because you have me. You know that no matter what happens, I'm there in the middle of it with you, and it's all going to end with me embracing you, welcoming you home.

As Christians, it's kind of like we're on this diet. (All my analogies are food related because I'm still coming off that Thanksgiving meal). But as Christians, we know we're not made to get fed everything at once. We don't need everything quickly, we don't need it right now. We live patiently. How often does scripture talk about *waiting on the Lord*? That's faith. There's something bigger and more important than this moment here. I can look at the future with hope and trust. Instead of being afraid of the future, I'm just waiting to see what God is going to give me next. Knowing that an awesome future is always on the way, gives me power to pace myself, discipline myself in the here and now.

You might say, believers stand out from the rest of the world because we live a little bit hungry. You know how, when you're hungry, everything you eat tastes amazing? Well, that's how believers live. We know a new world is on the way. So now we see the world in front of us for what it is. It's an appetizer. It's not the full meal. It's preparation for an amazing feast. And when you're a little hungry, when you're waiting for what you know is going to be the full meal, and a loving gathering—every little thing in this life comes into focus. Everything—every person—becomes a gift. Life starts tasting...amazing. That's the life our Father wants for us in this world, as he prepares us for a joy beyond words.