

Advent 1 Year C November 2021

Luke 21:25-38

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

---

When Advent comes around I often think of that song by John Lennon... "and so this is Christmas, and what have we done, another year older....a new one just begun".

Advent means "coming". We're looking forward to the *coming* of Christ. This is what today's text says:

*[25] "There will be **signs** in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. [26] People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. [27] Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. [28] Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

The context of this passage is the invasion of Jerusalem by the Roman Army in 70AD. For the Jews of the time it has echoes of the invasion of Jerusalem by Babylon almost 500 years earlier. This is a catastrophe of unimaginable proportions – the apparent end of hope for the Kingdom of God on earth.

And yet Jesus announces this event as the sign to his listeners that their *redemption* is drawing near. What on earth does this mean? How can their redemption be drawing near when they are being violently overrun? How can it be that this violent overthrow of Jerusalem is linked in any way to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming with power and glory?

It seems to me that we can only make sense of these questions when we remember that the coming of the Son of Man with power and glory cannot be separated from the cross. The power and glory of God is the crucified one who is raised and who sends his Spirit of cruciform love. This is nothing more powerful in the world.

The mystery is that it often doesn't look like much is happening particularly when we are in the midst of a new strain of Covid; or our houses are burning around us as was the case last summer in many places in our countries.

At times like this our hearts might cry out, like King David (Psalm 13):

How Long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

How LONG are we going to have to live with Covid before we can get back to "normal". How LONG are we going to have to live with civil war before we have peace?

The Jews understood the Babylonian invasion of a sign of Gods judgement – but in light of Jesus we can see that this is not the violent judgement of an angry Father (you were naughty I'm going to destroy your city). The judgement of the fall of Jerusalem operates as a bringing down onto our own heads the consequences of our own actions. The destruction of Jerusalem, as well as being a historic event is also a perpetual symbol of the consequences of refusing Christ's kingdom of peace. If we live by the sword when we will die by the sword. If we live unsustainably, we will overheat the planet. This is a scientific reality. God does not make these things happen – we do. BUT God will use such things to change us.

Christ is not doing this violence TO us. Christ is suffering this violence FROM us and WITH US. And this invites us to repentance. To turn around....to refocus our attention. This is why Jesus can say, your 'redemption is drawing near' because when we look at the catastrophe and we look at Jesus on the cross – which is a symbol of God's solidarity in our Sin – this is like this huge wake up call. We are woken up by the sound of fire engines. The fire of God's spirit is a fire of confrontation, a fire of cleansing us from our addictions and therefore a fire of hope.

God is not going to overthrow kingdoms and come in glory using our violent human rules of engagement. The great revolution of the coming of God as the crucified one is a revolution in our perception of God. No longer do we equate the action of God in our lives with success. God is not the head of our personal army to conquer our enemies.

Only cruciform love can change the world. And this is happening – the kingdom is coming through lives changed by the Holy Spirit – lives changed by the softening of hearts – lives changed by small acts of kindness – lives changed by clear strategic thinking.

When we sing "O come O come Emmanuel" we are praying that God will come to us today....as he does....here among us right now...in our community and in the breaking of the bread....right now. Christ is here among us. This is our hope. Ma-ra-na-th means "The Lord is Coming" (or the *Lord has Come*; or *Come Lord*)

Where are you noticing the cruciform love of God active in your experience of life at the moment?