

Advent 1-November 28, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Luke 21:25-36

"Raise Your Heads" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus tells us to do a strange thing after he describes all the destruction and distress that will happen to heaven and earth when he comes again. Jesus says, "Stand up and raise your heads." I remember having tornado drills in school. The thought of such an event brought a little fear to us even if we all knew that it was just a drill, and we would be safe. But our instructions to prepare in case there was a real tornado was the opposite of what Jesus said. We were told to get down under our desks and cover our heads to protect ourselves from danger. If we saw Jesus coming on the clouds, we are told there will be some similar scary signs, but we who believe Jesus has come to redeem us have nothing to fear. Therefore, Jesus said, "Stand up and raise your heads."

Jesus begins by describing some of the signs that will take place when Jesus comes again in his glory. What will take place is much like what many of us have already seen in our lifetimes. Most of us who live in the Midwest have seen firsthand the devastation that tornadoes can leave behind. Even if we haven't seen firsthand the roaring of the sea and waves because we don't live near a coast, we all have seen on tv how people prepare for hurricanes by boarding up the window in their homes. Again, when coastal areas know in advance that a hurricane may strike, the advice is not to stand up and raise your head and watch the destruction that will occur around you. Most often the advice is to leave your home and drive inland to find shelter. All the tornados, hurricanes, tsunamis and even tragic deaths and injuries that just occurred this past week at a Christmas parade in Wisconsin are only signs of the end. Since we are meeting today, obviously none of these have been THE end, because we have not seen the Son of Man coming in a cloud. And even though we all can remember natural devastations in our lifetimes, heaven and earth have not passed away.

I found it interesting that Jesus describes the end of all things by saying that they will pass away. I was curious if Jesus was given credit for coining the term "pass away" that is often used instead of "death". Wikipedia has made at least one error in their information since they missed that Jesus said these words first. Instead, it credits the first usage of the euphemism for death as passed away from the Medieval period when it was believed that the spirit of a person was separated from the body and it "passed away" from this earth to a new place. Jesus usually doesn't sugar coat the reality of death or his return. However, when Jesus tells us to notice the signs of the end that appear as destruction for many people, we are to look at these signs in the same way we see the leaves sprout from trees each spring. The sprouting of leaves in the spring is our sign that new life is on its way and there is nothing to fear.

Without seeing the Son of Man coming in the clouds, there is good reason for us to put our heads down and protect ourselves from natural disasters. These natural disasters don't even have to be as extreme as tornados or hurricanes when we fear if we might be in the path of them. One of the fears of the threats of predicted storms is whether you will be hit or missed. When there is a possibility of a hailstorm, you don't take your car out of the protection of the garage to test your odds of getting hit. You

*put your car inside just to be safe. Soon we will again be hearing the forecasts of snowstorms and we will prepare for them by having plenty of groceries on hand and things picked up from our yards. While we are still on this side of the return of Jesus, we do not raise our heads and be careless. Jesus assures us that we will know when the kingdom of God has come near, and we will raise our heads to welcome his coming.*

*When Jesus declares his return, there is no escape. The return of Jesus won't happen like when we first heard of the coronavirus. We won't find out about it by watching the news and learn that Jesus was now in China and within a couple months would be arriving in the United States. You won't see the return of Jesus by looking at the news and tracking where he is like tracking where Santa is making his deliveries. You will know that Jesus has returned by looking up and seeing him coming in the clouds. His return will be made known for all who live on the face of the earth.*

*When you and I look up and see Jesus coming in the clouds, we will have nothing to fear. Jesus is bringing our redemption, not our condemnation. We can be certain of this because of the one thing that will remain after everything else has passed away is God's word.*

*In the season of Advent, we anticipate the birth of Jesus. In a couple weeks we will once again hear this story told by our children in their Christmas programs. We hear about the birth of Jesus from the Christmas music that is played on radio stations this time of the year. There are Christmas movies that are only aired leading up to Christmas Day. We have many signs showing us that Christmas is coming, but none of us are surprised by Christmas because it has already happened over 2000 years ago. Most of us have no doubt that Jesus was born because we believe what was prophesied in the scriptures and the details of his birth recorded by Luke are true because everything else in God's word is true and has taken place.*

*On this first Sunday of Advent, the scriptures do remind us of the one thing that is yet to happen. Heaven and earth will pass away, and we will see Jesus' face to face. Until that day, we live by faith. We also live with concerns and fears that continue to threaten us in this life. We are well aware that the pandemic is still near to us. We know that there are shortages of things we want. We wonder if the price of gas will go higher or if it will ever get cheaper again. We worry about what the future will be for our children and grandchildren. We wonder if our jobs will remain the same or get better or pass away. We worry if the hail will hit our homes or miss us. There are many things in this life that can make us worry.*

*Jesus is aware that it is our nature to worry about many things in this life. Jesus gives us the solution of what to do when we are weighed down with the worries of this life. Before we raise our heads, we are to bow our heads in prayer. Jesus tells us to cast our every care to his heavenly Father. Praying will send our concerns away and replace them with God's strength so we can face every challenge in this life.*

*God will help us through every evil of this age and for these things we pray for God's strength to endure them. But when it comes to our redemption, we need not pray. We can stand up and raise our heads because our redemption does not depend on the second coming of Christ. Jesus Christ has already come near to us when he died on the cross for you and for me. He has already removed our greatest fear by taking away your sins so that the promise of eternal life that was given in your baptism are the very words you need most to hear that cannot pass away. You will be able to stand up and raise your heads and look to the east and sing, the Lord is on the way. Amen*