

Gospel Reading Luke 21:25-36  
*Hope in the Lord*  
The Rev. Tom Hagood  
Sunday, Nov. 29, 2009

I read a most wonderful brief parable this week ... not one by Jesus, but by the Christian author Doug Mendenhall ... from *Getting Prepared for the Arrival of Jesus* ... it made me pause and reflect on this day, the First Sunday of Advent ... Listen with me ...

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and [wondered if] he could spend a day or two with us. I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?" I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him.

It's not like it's your in-laws and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa.

That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the interstate. I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look, because my wife hissed, "What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"

So I covered the receiver and told her Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes, and she ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way that Marine drill instructors give guidance to recruits. ... My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were reprobate loser slobs.

I turned off the TV in the den, which was blaring some weird scary movie I'd been half watching. But I could still hear screams from our bedroom, so I turned off the reality show it was tuned to. Plus, I turned off the kids' set out on the sun porch, because I didn't want to have to explain *Jon & Kate Plus Eight* to Jesus, either, six minutes from now.

My wife had already thinned out the magazines that had been accumulating on the coffee table. She put *Christianity Today* on top for a good first impression. Five minutes to go.

I looked out the front window, but the yard actually looked great thanks to my long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes any way? I did notice the mail had come, so I ran out to grab it.

Mostly it was Netflix envelopes and a bunch of catalogs tied into recent purchases, so I stuffed it back in the box. Jesus doesn't need to get the wrong idea—three minutes from now—about how much online shopping we do.

I plumped up sofa pillows, my wife tossed dishes into the sink, I scolded the kids, and she shooed the dog.

With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus

is not an eight-minute job. Then the doorbell rang. *Used with permission from author. Doug Mendenhall, "Getting Prepared for the Arrival of Jesus," preachingtoday.com.*

Seems like quite an appropriate story for this Sunday as we begin the season of Advent. Because if you think about it ... We all will, some day, have such an encounter with Christ. He may not show up at the 7-11 on the interstate to announce his coming ... but one day we'll have to get ready for the visit.

See how you feel about preparing yourself for the visit from our Savior as you hear the words of our gospel lesson from Luke, chapter 21, verses 25-36. For some of us ... these words might sound frightening. For others of us ... they ring with the excitement of Christmas morning. Listen with you heart to the word of the Lord speaking to you.

21:25 "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.

21:26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

21:27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory.

21:28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

21:29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees;

21:30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

21:31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

21:32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

21:33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

21:34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly,

21:35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

21:36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

This is the word of our Lord. **Thanks bet to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

This little passage has become known as the “little apocalypse” ... words of Jesus that seem to be warning of the end times and that you’d better be prepared or else.

Many people have speculated through the years when the end of the world would take place ... and up to this point ... not a single prediction has been true ... now that’s a safe statement, isn’t it. After all ... both the gospel of Matthew and Mark tell us: "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

However, I’m really not sure that we need to be reading so much about the end times into these words of Jesus. After all, the actual Greek meaning of the word apocalypse is a lifting of the veil ... a revelation ... and that is precisely what happened when Christ first appeared in this world.

The birth of Christ was an apocalypse ... a lifting of the veil between humanity and God ... and our world ... and the Kingdom of God ... became one. And because of God’s apocalypse ... God’s revelation to us ... we, as Christians ... have been given a gift ... a gift called hope.

Now on the face of it ... hope doesn’t sound like that much. We all have hopes ... some may even call them hopes and dreams. I hope I will be able to make that trip next year ... or I hope I will get the latest Wii Video game ... or the Zhu Zhu Pet Hamster under the Christmas tree this year ... or I hope the church is able to make its budget this year ... or I hope the weather will be good for the game today ... or I hope that job bid is accepted ... those are hopes and dreams ... and we all have them.

But the hope given to us in the birth of Jesus Christ ... the first coming of Christ into this world ... is a gift unlike anything we might desire in this world. God’s gift of hope is something so very special ... and it’s given to each of us ... God’s hope for us is the kind of hope we receive when life seems completely hopeless ... when you don’t know how to fix it ... when one more straw will break your back ... when you feel there is nothing left but a world of darkness ... and all that is left is the faint flicker of hope in Christ.

That’s the kind of hope that Christ brought into this world with his birth ... and it’s the same hope that is given to each of us as we walk through the ups and downs of this world.

It is the same hope that each of us holds on to at our own end time ... when we finally leave this world and fully join with Christ in God’s Kingdom. Though we are still fully grounded in the world ... just as Christ reminds us in the parable of the fig tree ... we are called to remember that in this world of signs of troubles and despair ... we are also called to see and remember that Christ is already here among us ... breathing hope into a world in which there was none without him ... touching our hearts in ways that pass all of our

human understanding ... giving us hope when we see none.

In the midst all the turmoil of war and poverty and homelessness and terror and despair we see or experience in this world ... we can sometimes forget that Christ has already come into this world ... and is redeeming and healing us ... in the grace of God's Kingdom ... already present in the world ... but not yet completed.

And that completion ... however it comes ... whether it comes with signs in the sun, moon and stars ... will be fulfilled in God's good time. But even yet ... there is still the gift of God's hope to us ... the promise that we will be brought fully into the Kingdom of God ... to that place ... that Christ is already preparing for us.

That is the hope of Advent ... the Christ who has come ... and who will come again ...  
"The Hopes & Fears of All the Years *are Met in Thee Tonight.*"

Last week Wendy Dewberry and I were at Egleston visiting Arkeya. When we got there, she was out of her room having physical therapy. So we sat in a waiting room until she returned. And there ... in that room ... was a young couple with their 22-month-old daughter, Audrey.

Audrey had had a liver transplant ... her first liver had to be removed because of cancer. Only now doctors had discovered two spots on her new liver ... and this young couple was so worried and scarred that the cancer had now once again infected the new organ that was supposed to save their daughter's life.

To put it mildly ... they were terrified. So Wendy and I prayed with them ... praying for God's comfort and compassion and healing. We prayed together ... believing with all of our hearts that this young family's hopes and fears would be met in Christ.

Sometimes that's all we can do. Doctors will sometimes fail us. . . the medical profession will sometimes fail us ... we will all experience disappointment, disillusionment ... the WORLD will fail us ... but Jesus will never fail us ... no matter what ... we will be safe with him ... not only now ... but through eternity. That's where we CAN place our hope. Sometimes that's all we can do.

When you sit at the bedside of a dying spouse ... or a dear friend ... and you don't know what to do ... and tears are streaming down your face ... there is still hope in Christ.

When you find yourself growing older and now living in a place that is not your home of so many years ... and your friends have died or are so far away ... there is still hope in Christ.

When you have lost your job ... and the fear of losing everything else seems to overwhelm you ... there is still hope in Christ.

When the doctor's words strike your heart like a dagger and you are filled with fear ...

there is still hope in Christ.

When the pain of depression is only soothed by another drink of scotch or an illegal drug ... and you feel that life just isn't worth living ... there is still hope in Christ.

When the emotional trauma of abuse ... be it physical or emotional ... is turning your world into a nightmare that never ends ... there is still hope in Christ.

When the love and trust you had in your spouse is shattered and your life suddenly explodes into a million pieces ... there is still hope in Christ.

No matter what may happen to you in this world ... there is always the hope of Christ.

And here ... in this season of Advent ... we are reminded again of the promise of our Savior ... a promise that Christ told us after he had risen from death ... "And remember ... I am with you ... unto the end of the age."

That is why we revisit the coming of Christ each year at Christmas ... the story of the Christ child ... the first coming ... to be reminded that hope was born anew in this world ... and that hope is God's gift to you ... knowing fully well that in the end of all the things that we might know in this world ... all the things that might cause suffering and pain ... God's love and grace and redemption for this world ... will still be fulfilled in the Christ's second coming ... a promise God has made ... and a promise Christ God will keep.

You see ... if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior ... one day you will encounter the Risen Christ. Maybe he will call you on the phone and let you know he's on the way over. Maybe you will come face to face with him when you leave this earth. Maybe even you will be a witness to the second coming of our Savior. It really doesn't matter how it happens.

Because when the doorbell rings ... Christ isn't going to care what movies you were watching ... or what magazines you were reading ... or whether or not your house was clean or not ... Christ is going to come into your life to fulfill his promise to you ... and in the fulfillment of that promise ... all the Hopes & Fears of All the Years you may have experienced or are experiencing in this world ... will be Met in Christ.

It is here ... in this community of disciples ... that we gather together to support each other ... to share our compassion with each other ... to lift each other up in times of trouble and pain ... and to even experience just a glimpse ... of the reality of the hope in Christ ... ushered into this world in the birth of a little baby ... brought into reality on Easter morn ... and fulfilled in the time of God yet unknown.

Let us pray:

So by your Spirit may we share the life you're bringing forth:  
May we seek justice, end despair, and work to heal the earth.

For there's a new day coming near with no more death or pain;  
Till then, we'll seek to serve you here and welcome in your reign.  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.