

First Sunday of Advent, November 27, 2022  
 “Where Are You?” (Mathew 24:36-44)

Today – as we do every year on the first Sunday in Advent – we come face to face with one of the apocalyptic texts from Scripture, a text focusing on the apocalypse or last days when God will come and gather his people unto himself. According to Matthew, this is what Jesus says about the coming of the Son of Man.

*Two will be working in the field;  
 one will be taken and one will be left behind.  
 Two women will be grinding meal together;  
 one will be taken and one will be left behind.  
 Keep awake...for you do not know on what day  
 your Lord is coming.  
 It will be like the days before the flood.  
 The people were eating and drinking,  
 marrying and being given in marriage...  
 until the day Noah entered the ark  
 and the waters swept them all away.*

The people of the flood were all caught off guard. And Christ says that we will be caught off guard, too, for his return will come unexpectedly like a thief in the night. Therefore, we need to be in a constant state of readiness, a constant state of preparedness. And that’s what Advent is about: being ready, being prepared, expectantly awaiting our Lord’s coming; not just his coming at Christmas, but the day when he comes again in glory.

Apocalyptic texts, like the one before us today, can bring us uneasiness and a bit of distress. They warn us that all we find predictable and comfortable in our lives will be swept away, and that there is nothing we can do about it. So where is the good news in this text? These seem to be words of gloom, despair and warning. Isn’t the gospel supposed to proclaim words of hope, comfort, and promise? But there is some good news here. The good news is that Jesus is coming again. The good news is that God will never abandon his children, but is always calling out to us and seeking to bring us to himself. The good news is that God says *yes* to sinful humanity.

Let’s go back to the garden of Eden and look at God’s first *yes*. The first man and woman – living in a paradise provided by God – did a little eating, but ate from the wrong tree. As a result, eyes were opened and nakedness was discovered. Some fig trees lost their leaves and new clothes were sewn. When Adam and Eve heard the sound of God walking in the garden, they hid from him. God called out to Adam, *Where are you?* Adam answered, *I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

The two were punished for their disobedience by being banned from the garden. But God allowed them to live. God even provided them with animal skins for clothing as they left the garden. In spite of their disobedience, God said *yes* to the crowning jewels of his creation, so that the world might continue through them.

In the days before the flood, in the midst of all the evil on earth, God longed to find someone who remained faithful and obedient to him. *Where are you?* God called. And God found Noah, a man of faith who obeyed God and did what everyone else found to be insane. He built a large boat on dry land. And when God destroyed the earth in the flood, Noah and his family survived. God saved this small remnant. He spared this handful of people to avoid the complete destruction of humankind. Again, God said *yes* so that the world might be saved.

And we can't forget how God said *yes* to Abraham. God sought out this faithful old man, blessed him with a son and promised to make him the father of a great nation. Then about 500 years later, God sought out this chosen nation, these descendants of Abraham, and said *yes* to their cries for help by delivering them from their bondage to the Egyptians, even though they proved to be rebellious toward God.

And down through the centuries, rebellion seems to be the trait or characteristic possessed by all humans. Our sinful human nature tells us that we are in charge of our own lives. As a result, we tend to keep God at a distance, allowing him to close that gap only during time of trouble or crisis. But our God is not a distant kind of God. He is a God who wants to be up close and personal, One who desires to be in relationship with his people.

Continually seeking to draw his rebellious people close to himself, God asks, *Where are you? You honor me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me.* Still, even though we often say *no* to God, God always says *yes* to us. And it is at this time of year when we prepare to celebrate the biggest *YES* of all. Seeking out a people who remained unfaithful, disobedient, and rebellious, God took on human flesh and came to us in the form of a baby. When we could not – or would not – reach out to God, God reached out to us. Someone once wrote, *Christmas is love tugging us back to God with a powerful clasp of a tiny hand reaching out from a bed of straw.* Those same hands were then nailed to a cross. With arms outstretched, God said *YES* to us through his only Son. *Come to me all of you who are weary and bearing heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* On that cross, God saved his people once again! That's the good news.

But the question remains: *Where are you?* Are you in hiding, like Adam and Eve? Are you afraid and lonely, worried and fearful? Are you self-satisfied by all your accomplishments, sitting on your middle-class laurels in the most affluent country in the world? Are you living in a world you cannot control? Does an apocalypse of anxiety keep you awake at night? *What if the stock market crashes? How will we pay for college? What if the tumor is malignant? What will be the next crisis with my aging parents or my children? How will I have the time and energy to meet the needs of all who depend on me?*

It's so easy to become frustrated and ask what difference any of it makes anyhow. Today's scripture seems to support this way of thinking. It will be in the midst of our marrying and working, in the midst of our eating and drinking, in the midst of our day to day living when that unexpected moment will arrive and we'll all be swept away. And there is not one thing we can do about it.

But there is hope. Even though each one of us lives in the shadow of the apocalypse, there is good news. There is the promise of Advent. In the darkness, in the shadows, in the unpredictable

anxiety of our lives, God is present. God is in control and God will come again. With each candle we light, the shadows recede a bit and the promise comes closer. With each candle we light, we are proclaiming that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. The promise is that wherever there is darkness – in our lives or in the world around us – God is present to help us endure and hope is alive. With each candle we light, we celebrate the *YES* that God has spoken through Christ our Lord.

So where are you? Are you withering away with anxiety or are you waiting expectantly for the fulfillment of God's promises? Are you cowering in the darkness of fear and dread or are you raising your heads in the light of hope? Are you burying your time, talents and treasures or are you using them to serve God and others? God has said *yes* to us and God calls us to respond by saying *yes* to him.

This Advent season will give us the opportunity to look around at our lives and consider how we can better use all that we have to better serve God and others. God's question requires an answer. So let us take an honest look at all aspects of our lives and how we're using what we have – be it time, talents, or money. Chances are we'll discover places that warrant readjusting: a little less time watching TV and a little more time in service to others; a little less time admiring the skills and abilities of others and a little more time discovering and using our own; a little less money spent on things we could really do without and a little more given to God's service.

Advent calls us to examine our lives, evaluate our motives and actions, and ask the question, *In God's eyes, where am I?* But wherever we are, may we know that God is blessing us and inviting us to emerge from our hiding places, to participate in God's kingdom, and boldly share what God has first given us.

My friends, God IS in control. God will come again. May we wait in hope and trust for his coming. May we wait in faithful service and stewardship. For that's how the God of *yeses* desires to find us. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.