

“Waiting Through the Crisis”

Based on Luke 21:25-36

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Waiting...that's what Advent means. We are in a time of waiting. We are, of course, waiting for Christmas to get here. But there are other things we are waiting for. We may be waiting for this year to be over, or waiting for school to be over. Maybe waiting to feel better, or waiting for that check to arrive in the mail. Maybe waiting for an answer, or some sign that will show us what to do next. Maybe waiting for the phone to ring.

The scripture reading this morning has something to do with waiting; waiting for Jesus to come back. We read of all these terrible signs, chaos and confusion, the heavens being shaken, the nations in an uproar. It's a description of some global disruption of epic proportions. And Jesus says that when all these things happen, we are to lift up our heads and get excited because that's the sign that the Son of Man is coming to redeem us. And Jesus says that this generation won't pass away until all these things take place. That's where the waiting comes in. Two thousand years have gone by and we are still waiting for all these things to take place. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." We're still waiting for the heavens and earth to pass away.

But let me take it to a more personal level. Maybe what you are seeing are not signs of the world coming to the end, but maybe it is signs of *your world* coming to an end. You look around you and what you see isn't pretty. The doctor comes back with the report: you have stage three liver cancer. Grandpa was out early in the morning, driving over to Jolly Roger like he always does for coffee and donuts. Out of nowhere, a speeding car crashes into him and he dies a few hours later at the hospital. You began to have your doubts, but slowly it becomes obvious that your son has become a drug addict. And he has been stealing from you to support his habit. In so many different ways, our worlds can get

rocked. Life as it was will no longer continue. It has passed away. What then? What might you be waiting for in times like this?

One option is dissipation and drunkenness. When the crisis hits and your world has come crashing down all around you, some people choose the option of self-medication. Using whatever drug of choice, the goal is to numb the pain, to experience a feeling of bliss, to push away all the struggles and hurts that life has dealt. There is a logic in choosing this option. Pain is nature's way of alerting us that something is amiss and needs to be dealt with. Pain is like an alarm. We need to find out what is going on that is setting off the pain alarm. But sometimes, we would rather hit the snooze button. We would rather just turn the pain alarm off instead of deal with whatever set it off. Just don't want to deal with the pain. People choose to numb the pain. But the source of the pain doesn't go away. If you hit the snooze button, the alarm will eventually go off again. Will you choose to hit the snooze button again or turn the alarm off by getting to the root issue, in this case, getting out of bed and on with your day? When dealing with the pain alarm, there is the option to hit the snooze button with drugs or alcohol. Or, as Jesus put it in Luke 21:34, "dissipation and drunkenness."

Another option is to fret and be anxious about your situation. This is the option of lying awake all night playing through your mind every conceivable negative outcome. You spin out one disaster after another. Say for instance you think your performance review at your job is going to be horrible. As you lie in bed fretting about it, you imagine the boss saying, "I can't cut it." Then I'm going to get fired. And I won't be able to find another job in my field. And I'm too old to go back to school and launch a new career. And no one will want to hire me because I'm overqualified. We're going to lose the house. My wife will leave me. I'm going to end up living on the streets because my car will be repossessed. My brother and dad will write me off as a failure. My life will end up a total waste. From "my performance review is going to be terrible" to "my life is a total waste." That's quite a stretch! But that's an option when you see signs of your world falling apart. You can fret, stew, talk yourself into paralysis. When a crisis hits and our lives spin out of control, it can be scary. Everything we used to take for granted,

where we had a sense of security, can get rattled. And when that happens, fear raises up its ugly head. And fear can easily cause us to stop dead in our tracks. We get confused, unsure, anxious. We don't know for sure what to do next. And then the simplest of tasks becomes a monumental struggle. We can become trapped in our fantasies of gloom and doom.

There is a third option, the one that Jesus suggests when the world, or our world, starts to fall apart. We can stay alert and pray. We can pay attention to what is happening and look for those who can help us. We can look for signs that God is still with us, even as we wait expectantly for God to see us through the time of crisis. We can simply ask ourselves, "What do I need to do right now? What is the next faithful step I can take?" A counselor reminded me once that when you get your car stuck in the mud, you can either go backward or forward but to get unstuck you have to keep moving. When you find yourself stuck in a crisis, keep moving. Stay engaged with life. You may be surprised what you discover when you pay attention to life in times of crisis. Someone who was experiencing a deep crisis discovered that he had a lot of friends who were there for him, to help him take care of his life when he didn't have the strength or desire to take care of himself. He used to think, "Life is great, it's people that annoy me." Now it's reversed. For him, people are great, it's life that's annoying sometimes. That's the benefit of staying alert and engaged with life during times of upheaval, instead of numbing your senses with drugs or freezing yourself in fear of what might happen. God not only gets us through the crisis but also gives us wisdom.

When we see signs of our world falling apart, Jesus calls us to pray. Whether those prayers are written in a prayer book, or your own conversation with God, or sighs and groans, just keep praying through those world-shattering times. I have found that in times where life was chaotic and topsy-turvy, that I could find a measure of order and stability by sticking to a set time of prayer. Whatever time of the day you choose, pick a time, and go to a specific spot in your house. Maybe you have a chair in the corner of the family room, or maybe it's looking out the kitchen window. Have a book of prayers in hand, or read some scripture,

or simply sit still and share your thoughts with God. Be still and know God's presence. Feel the tension of the chaos, experience all your feelings, in those moments of prayer with God. Sticking to daily prayer can do wonders in creating moments of calm during times of chaos and confusion.

Our tradition teaches us that one day the heavens and the earth will pass away. We also know that one day every one of us in this space will pass away. And as long as we are alive on this earth, we will face struggles and our share of catastrophe, when it seems our whole world is coming to an end. When these times come, Jesus would tell us to lift up our heads and be assured that the Lord is coming to redeem, to save, to carry us through the chaos and set us down in a better place. That is our hope, our expectant hope, as we wait for our salvation. When it seems the world is coming to an end, don't get drunk, don't be overcome with worry and anxiety. Instead, stay alert, pray, look for signs of God, pay attention to what life is trying to teach you, and keep moving. For God is with us, even as we wait for the second coming of Christ. And in God, whether we live or die, our life in God will never end.