

Dreghorn and Springside Parish Church: First Sunday of Advent 2020

Bible reading: Luke 21:25-36 (NIV)

Jesus said, 'There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² 'Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.'

Sermon: "Living each day in the now but not yet"

Tension can get such a bad press. We can get tension headaches when we have been really stressed. We can feel it, cut it with a knife when there's tension in a room. A fallout at work or in the home and you can feel decidedly uncomfortable. But tension can also be good; the cliff-hanger that ends the "to be continued" Netflix boxset. That just keeps you hooked. The weave of a well told story in the book you just can't put down. Tension makes things happen, the arrow flying sure and straight from the taut bow, the guitar string perfectly tuned so that when it is strummed it hits just the right note. The rapid changes in our society and our ever-contemporary missional God that drives the birthing of a new church at Towerlands, from our parent congregations of Dreghorn and Springside and Mure/Relief.

Tension... tension asks us to hold in balance two things that seem to be pulling apart, and that can be a challenge. This is often true when we try and wrestle with some of the big questions of our Christian faith. Is God our friend, or is he our judge? Is God close to us, or holy and other? Is God in charge, or do we have free will? When questions like this get too much for us, we often give up and collapse the tension, rather than try to wrestle with the apparent contradiction and find creative power and opportunity in that place.

Sunday 29th November marks the beginning of this year's Advent; Advent means "coming" and the "coming" of Jesus refers to his first coming as a baby some 2000 years ago. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus was a watershed moment in the in-breaking of God's Kingdom into his creation. An in-breaking that had been long promised by the prophets of old. It might have looked very different to what people had expected, but it made a transforming difference in the lives of everyone who has responded to it.

At the same time, the fullness of Jesus' Kingdom won't be complete until he comes again. As well as the first coming of Jesus as a human baby, there is also an expected second Advent, a "second coming" of Jesus. Jesus himself foretells that "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a

cloud with power and great glory.” Luke 21:27 Or again from the Letter to the Hebrews: “So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” Hebrews 9:28. After Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension back to his Father’s side, the angels explain to the disciples: “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11.

This belief in the return of Jesus shapes our understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and how we are to live in the world as we anticipate the second Advent. Imagine that you wake up early the day of a great event - it could be a special birthday party, or maybe even your wedding day. The night before is almost over, the sun is just beginning to come up. You are full of apprehension and excitement - and yet the event has not yet started. In this situation, you begin to live with both the anticipation of the event being almost here and frustration that it has not yet fully begun. You might begin to put on your special clothes and do all you could to make final preparations. But you would also hold that in tension with knowing that the event in all its fullness was still a few hours away yet. This is the “time” we live in as followers of Jesus. The night is almost gone, and the day of Jesus’ Kingdom has started to dawn. And yet, that Kingdom “day” has not yet arrived in all its fullness. We live with the suspense, the tension.

Sometimes this place of tension is called the “now and not yet” of the Kingdom: “Now” Jesus is King, and at the same time his Kingdom is “not yet” here in all its fullness. “Now” Satan is defeated, and yet at the same time we live with division, prejudice, war. We are waiting for all evil to be finally overcome and so our lives are “not yet” free from temptation. “Now” Jesus has healed the sick and has given us authority to do the same in his name, and at the same time we live in a time of virus, sickness and ill-health where many people are “not yet” healed. “Now” Jesus is resurrected from the dead and we are seated with him in the heavenly places, and at the same time we live in the “not yet” where all creation groans for healing and resurrection. This “now” and “not yet” calls us to a radical form of living. It asks us to be both hope-filled and also realistic. Life is not all roses and sunshine this side of Jesus’ second coming. We all struggle with pain, temptation, disappointment and loss. The earth continues to groan, the oppressed continue to cry “How long?” And yet in the middle of these challenging realities we have seen the sun beginning to rise and we are called to live in its light.

The Apostle Paul encourages us as to how we are to live in this time of tension, he writes: “Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” Romans 13:12-14. When we know a big event is coming, we put on our best clothes and prepare all we can for the coming celebration. And when we know Jesus is coming, we best put on our Jesus clothes - think here about Paul words to the followers of Jesus in Colossae at chapter 3:12-15. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

As followers of Jesus, we live in a holy tension, a time of holy suspense, in these in-between days of now but not yet, we are called to be ready for his return. As this first week of Advent begins reflect throughout this period, whether you are living a life which anticipates God’s eternity and celebrates

what is best for you, for the people around you, and the world which God has made. Live in the tension and find the creative power and opportunity in this place. Amen.

Jamie Milliken
First Sunday of Advent 2020