

Stand Up and Raise Your Hands 1 Advent C

“So also, when you see these things taking place, stand up and raise your hands, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:31

The season of Advent got an early start with shoppers descending on stores after Thanksgiving. It was also the start of anxiety. When we think of anxiety think of a mother traveling with any small child who is never easy, but especially when you have one with special needs, there are additional challenges. The whole process of getting through airport security and dumping all the carry-ons, strollers and car seats onto the conveyor belt, while holding your child and removing your shoes, is no small effort. Just think of the “dump and dance routine” you go through as adult!

One mother wrote that on her last trip to New York, she was down to her bare feet and just about to start the process of trying to remove her son’s shoes and leg braces, a kind security person took pity on her and said that she could leave them on him and just let someone “scan” them. This was a sign of civility in a world filled with anxiety.

In his book *When God Whispers Your Name* (Nelson, 1999), Max Lucado says that “The German word for worry means ‘to strangle.’ The Greek word for worry means ‘to divide the mind.’ Both are accurate. Worry is a noose on the neck and a distraction of the mind.”

There is a joke in my household that when cats and dogs are living together you know the end is near! While that may not be one of the signs of God’s kingdom there are some other signs in scripture that might evoke anxiety. The gospel predicts that the “powers of the heavens will be shaken prior to “the Son of Man coming in a cloud.”

The year 2012 is getting a lot of attention these days. The cable channels are getting a lot of mileage out of these gloomy scenarios but there is nothing we can do about them. It is a part of the cycle of the universe.

Despite all the talk of anxiety our Savior has said, “My words will not pass away.” Notice with me that Jesus says these things to make a point. He calls to our attention what is unshakable – His words. His words will not pass away.

Our Savior tells a parable about the trees sprouting leaves. This is a friendly sign of God’s kingdom and we can look for these as well as the more supernatural ones. The one who said, “Let not your hearts be troubled...” is also the God who bids us give our anxiety about the last days to Him.

One thing leads to another. That’s how life works. You see leaves sprout and you know spring is here and summer is not too far behind. That is the cycle of life that is ordered. One cause leads to an effect. The changes and chances of life have been going on this way longer than recorded history. Changes in space also happen

in time. These changes could have catastrophic results on earth. And yet God is in control. The one who creates is the one that also controls. Our job is to have faith even when the universe has a hiccup.

Life is uncertain. In a hospital waiting room I listened to a mother tell me of the unfortunate death of her son in law this year. Healthy, a sweet man and he was very good to her daughter. Gone! from a freak accident. What do we cling to when our world is shaken?

I watched a video production called, "Faith Journeys," by a man well known to this community for his work. I was told by a member of this man's bible study group that this gifted man had his son die this year from a sudden accident. I am told faith got him through the anxiety.

When these things happen we recoil from the shock and pain of our loss. Our world suddenly is changed forever. Questions like, "Where are you God in all of this?" might surface. These kinds of events, both natural and supernatural will happen but the words of our Savior remain for our comfort and peace. His words have the power to take us through to the other side of grief. If we employ them and hide these words in our hearts they will be like a rock when hell is breaking out all around.

Leaning on Christ's words is a good investment. They are like gold coins which are increasing in value every day. We all know that Jesus taught the two most important commandments that are a summary of all the rest: love God and love your neighbor.

Two verses from today's letter from St Paul also point to supernatural signs. "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). Love and holiness are signs that will do more good than the ones spoken on History channel or The Learning Channel.

We prayed with the collect of the day that "we may rise to the life immortal." Christ came that we might inherit immortality by living such an immortal life in the here and now. St Athanasius summed up God's plan for our lives; "God became man that man might become God." We were saved to be sons and daughters of God; the greatest signs that God's kingdom is near. When we see these things begin to take place in our lives stand up and raise your hands and give thanks to God. These are the signs that God will look for in us. When these signs are with us the other signs matter very little. Worry not Jesus said, "Behold, I am with even until the end of the world. Amen.