

He Is Coming To Execute Justice

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the first Sunday in Advent, November 27, 1988. Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.

I'm looking forward to Christmas just four weeks away. I'm looking forward to parties, family get-togethers, and to the giving and receiving of gifts. I'm also looking forward to the coming of Christ. Yes, I believe that Jesus is coming again. Advent is the season of the church year in which the church looks forward to the return of Jesus. It's a time, not only for longing for Christmas presents, but also a time of longing for the return of Jesus. Of course we don't long for Jesus to be born again in Bethlehem. We long for Jesus to come again and to right all that's wrong in the world and in our own lives.

In the Gospel, Jesus predicts, "They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Jesus is telling us about the final triumph of his Father's kingdom. He's telling us that a moment will come when he himself will appear to judge the world. His judgment will destroy all who perpetrate injustice and work unrighteousness. He will gather together his chosen ones, and cast off all who refuse his love.

Jesus made this promise but after nearly two thousand weary years of waiting it's only natural that we should wonder if what he said is really true. For nearly two thousand years we've witnessed the distress of nations in perplexity, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world;

fear of the AIDS epidemic, fear of the population explosion throughout the world, fears of the "green house" affect that will push temperatures higher and turn our fertile farmlands into deserts, perplexity as to how to solve the problem of our national debt without bringing on a deep recession; fears about how our children will meet the temptations of drugs and alcohol and sex. Add to that our own often futile attempts to change our ways and reform our lives and it's easy to lose heart. Why doesn't God step in and intervene?

If we believe in the Father of Jesus Christ all these terrible events are like the new leaves on the trees in the Spring which are sure signs that summer is coming. They're signs that point us to the coming of Christ. They're not signs that tell us when Christ will come. They're signs that tell us from where our salvation will one day come. We work for political and economic and social reforms but in the end our salvation will come not from our strivings but from God. If I believe that God is holy, just, and loving my faith demands that he'll come one day to execute justice and righteousness.

How can I believe in a loving God if the final end of Hitler and Mother Theresa are the same? How can I believe in a just and righteous God who never vindicates the victims of the holocausts in Armenia, Cambodia, the Sudan, and Nazi Germany? How can we believe in a God who loves the world so much that he sent his only son unless he vindicates the helpless poor, the powerless, and the victims of injustice and oppression?

Faith in a loving God demands that Christ come again in

glory and majesty to judge the living and the dead. So during Advent especially, we're reminded to watch and pray that God might establish our hearts unblamable in holiness before him at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints and that we and all we love might escape condemnation.

But during Advent we celebrate, not only the coming of Jesus in majesty, but also his coming in mystery. Some people are constantly looking for spectacular signs and wonders pointing to the coming of Christ. But Christians see in common Bread and Wine a sign of the coming of the Lord. He whom we hope to come at the end of time, comes to us this morning to cheer our hearts and give us hope for the future. Advent calls us to renew our hearts so that we may more fully receive Christ who comes among us in the mystery of His Word and Sacraments.

We prepare ourselves to receive the Sacrament in the same way that we prepare ourselves for Christ's coming in majesty; by taking heed to ourselves lest our hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, by watching at all times and praying that we might escape temptation and evil.

In the Sacrament of Holy Communion then, the Lord Jesus Christ comes again to us in mystery. Let us, then, lift up our hearts. Let us lift them to the Lord.

Let us pray: Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.