

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

First Sunday of Advent - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalms 25:1-10

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

12/02/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

[Jesus said:] 25“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. 28Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

29Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

34“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, 35like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Time

Good morning! A man much smarter than I am once said that time is relative, and oh, how right Einstein was. For instance, as you sit there listening to my sermons that I have tried very hard to keep around the 10-12 minute mark, they will end up feeling like much much longer to the listener, and as for me, they feel no longer than 5ish minutes. We see this all the time, no pun intended. An hour long dinner with friends never feels as long as an hour long lecture in school. This sense of time difference goes even further than just our perception of its passage. Because of Einstein's work we know that gravity also has a strong effect on time. Time moves faster the further it is away from the gravitational force. If we travel on a plane we age ever so slightly faster than the same amount of elapsed time here on solid ground.

And the way we measure time is strange. This goes beyond our understanding of clocks to the ways we have marked weeks, months, and years. For instance, the actual change in years

takes place on January 1st, but for parents and students the “new year” often begins in September when a new year of school begins. We have all heard of other calendars that were used in the past, such as the Zoroastrian and Babylonian calendars.

All this is to say that time can be viewed in a variety of different ways. And as Christians, the calendar again looks different. We follow the Revised Common Lectionary here in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and our “new year” begins with the season of Advent. This Sunday marks the beginning of a whole new year! What’s your resolution going to be?

The Revised Common Lectionary follows a three year cycle, this is how we get the specific reading that you hear every Sunday. The years are named year A, B, and C. Each year focuses on one of the three synoptic Gospels, that is Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Throughout each of the years we sprinkle in the Gospel of John. Year A focuses on the Gospel of Matthew, Year B is focused on Mark with a little more of John since the Gospel of Mark is the shortest, and Year C follows the Gospel of Luke.¹ This doesn’t mean that you won’t see the other Gospels show up from time to time, but it’s where the focus will fall. Some have suggested adding a Year D to give more focus on the Gospel of John, but that’s a whole other discussion. The Common Lectionary was first published in 1983, and later revised to become what we use now, the Revised Common Lectionary, in 1992.² The criteria for picking what gets read could basically be boiled down to this: it must proclaim or point towards the good news of Jesus Christ.

Just like any other calendar, the church also follows the pattern of observing different seasons. Where the secular world marks the changing of the seasons with words like fall, winter,

¹<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Worship/Lectionary>

²Ramshaw, Gail, and Mons Teig. *Keeping Time: The Church's Years*. Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg Fortress, 2009. p. 39.

spring, and summer, the church follows different seasons like Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. The miracle of Easter is actually what could be said is our most basic measurement of time. Every Sunday becomes a mini-Easter celebration as we gather together to worship a God who defeated death. This focus on Easter has its roots in the very beginnings of the church, but as time went along, we came to understand God's presence in a variety of different ways.

Gradually, we developed seasons of our own, with specific days in those seasons to focus our celebration. Like thousands of others before us, these festivals tended to follow the agricultural calendar or specific phases of the moon. We also gave each season a specific focus: Advent and the beginning of a new year focuses on the birth and anticipation of our savior, the 12 days of Christmas marvel at the mystery of his birth, and Epiphany celebrates the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We have a short stint of "ordinary time" before we hit the season of Lent, a time of preparation for Easter that in the early church marked the final last bit of education before someone was baptized on Easter. Lent is traditionally focused on the simple and can often feel a little depressing. Following the 40 days of Lent, we hit the main event! The season of Easter, or Eastertide as it's more officially called. After the 50 days of Easter we hit Pentecost, and it's back to ordinary time for the bulk of the year until we hit Advent again and start all over!

To help us mark the difference in seasons we tend to create certain rituals or behaviors that are observed. We also associate certain colors for certain days. During Advent, we wear blue, or in some churches you will see purple. Christmas is what we consider a particularly holy day and so we dress in white. Epiphany is green and then Lent is purple. The season of Easter is white and Pentecost is red. Following Pentecost we enter what we call ordinary time, or the time after Pentecost. Once again we wear green, the color you see the most in the church, which is

fine for me because it's my favorite color. Specific holy days like Transfiguration Sunday, Holy Trinity, and Feast of all Saints (or All Saints Sunday) are white. For Lutherans, we break out the red only one other time for Reformation Sunday.

Now that you have the rough overview, you're probably wondering what all this has to do with our text this Sunday. Some of you are probably thinking this is just me taking my chance to point out that it's not the Christmas season and that we're still in Advent! While that's true, it's not why.

We use the passage of time to help focus our worship experience. As the seasons change we follow along with the church year and the lectionary and experience the texts new each time. They take us on a journey. Yes, we know how the story ends, but with each change of the church calendar we shift our focus towards something new. Right now we start all over again. We follow the season of Advent right now, it is as real to us as anything else. We wait with expectation for the birth of Christ! In this season of the church year we hit pause and wait with bated breath for what God has said God would do... and what exactly is that? I'm glad you asked...

"14The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."3 Amen.

³Jeremiah 33:14-16 NRSV