

Beginnings in the Midst of Endings  
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Year C Advent 1, 2015  
Luke 21:25-36

1. Advent: The beginning starts with the End [...Life starts with death...]
  - a. Starting the new year of the Church we begin with the final days of Jesus in Jerusalem in Luke's gospel.
  - b. Since Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem in his final days before the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus has been systematically and metaphorically deconstructing life as first century Jews knew it.
    - i. Jesus single handedly turned over the **money changers tables** at the entrance to the Temple (No longer sacrifices of commodities, but instead the requirement is a humble and contrite heart)
    - ii. The ideas of **paying taxes to Caesar** took power away from political institutions and reclaimed a currency of truth and compassion for God's Kingdom. God cannot be bought with money, so don't get lost in a false value system Jesus teaches.
    - iii. Hence the **widow giving** the last of what she had to the treasury took her faith out of money and put it into God and God's people (if the law was indeed kept, the community would support this widow rather than neglect her).
    - iv. Then the **Temple (in its 2<sup>nd</sup> and revitalized rendering) is foretold to be condemned and destroyed** in Jesus' prophetic statement.
  - c. All of these episodes bring to the foreground a profound series of endings; and the greatest of which will come just days later on Good Friday.
2. So, as we consider what is at hand in today's lesson; we consider by asking the question, ***"Where is the "beginning" amidst all the language of "endings"?"***
  - a. Planted firmly in the middle of the cosmic signs of the "coming of the Son of Man" and the command to "Be on guard" is the parable of the fig tree.
  - b. The simple idea that we know the changing of the seasons by looking at the leaves of a fig tree, is precisely as simple and easy to distinguish the coming of the Kingdom of God.
  - c. "Don't over think it!" is essentially, what Jesus is saying. Don't imagine that God's Kingdom will have a secret code or password. Don't imagine that there is a way to "work the system" to figure it out.
  - d. If we are in-tune to the natural cycle of: *life- giving way to death- giving way to new life*, then we are on the right track. If we can watch these cycles unfold, then we will have eyes to see. But if we are

- honest, how much do we want to see? Seeing might make us actually have to believe... Believe that our world, for all its efficiencies and amenities, does not hold for us that which gives life in place of death.
3. 3 times Jesus says, “raise your heads,” “Be on guard,” “Be alert.” This repetitious call for mindfulness is a call to focus on the one who is the agent of transforming death into life- “the Son of Man.”
    - a. This language of the “Son of Man” is used by Jesus 81 times in the gospels<sup>1</sup> and reminds the listener of Daniel chapter 7... [Describe vision of beasts and competing authorities that fall under the reign of the Ancient of Days and brought to justice by the Son of Man]
    - b. Life in exile is to be redeemed by “the Son of Man”
    - c. A redemptive hope that life will thrive beyond the catastrophes of exile and separation from God.
    - d. In the call to be alert and watchful in this first Sunday of Advent (of the new church year), part of the call is to release our fixations on the authorities that would bind us to an unjust world.
      - i. What might be the signs of the temple merchants in our day that are to be overthrown bringing sanctity back to our worship of God?
      - ii. What can we release back to Caesar that was never intended to be ours in the first place?
      - iii. Ironically, what does our currency say for us to put our trust in? The poor widow would ask us
  4. It is not too late to recognize the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, because it is simply not too late to see where God’s reign still needs to take hold.
  5. We may not be in Babylonian exile, as the prophet Daniel was, but we certainly are not without our own exilic experiences of separating ourselves from God and the people God calls us to love.
  6. As tempting as it would be to tie this sermon up in a nice theological bow, the truth of the gospel today is that we are being called to expect more. We are being called to be alert and to see things as we have not seen them before.
  7. This week, in this season of anticipation, watching, and waiting, our work is not summed up in conclusion today, but rather broken open to find signs of God’s Kingdom coming.
  8. Whether we are in the beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning- we know this: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus’ words to us will not pass away.
  9. Raise your heads... Be on guard... Be alert... your redemption is drawing near.

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<sup>1</sup> The Life with God Bible footnote p. 1263 from *Daniel* chapter 7.