

November 29 2015 Year C First Sunday of Advent

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 136

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Luke 21:25-36

Sermon *Be a Lert; God Loves Lerts!*

So what in the world does today's passage from Luke's Gospel have to do with the celebration of Advent? The days and weeks during the church year when Christians prepare their hearts, prepare their homes, prepare their churches, for the celebration of the incarnation; the coming of God in human form in the person of the baby Jesus at Christmas time.

Who were those crazy priests, those crazy ministers, and those crazy Biblical scholars who choose this passage of all the passages in Scripture to help us get ready for this wonderful event in the life of the church and in the lives of us as God's Christian people? Jesus' coming is supposed to give us a warm and fuzzy feeling; it is supposed to connect with sheep and angels, candles and carols, and presents but these words in Luke's Gospel are pretty raw stuff. They deal in catastrophe events in nature and in the Heavens; fear and foreboding, Jesus in clouds, victory and the Kingdom of God being close at hand. And all of that sounds nothing like the words about Jesus' birth that we are used to hearing year after year after year after year. I have to do some research about that second question about who those crazy ministers and priests are, who picked these passages from the lectionary for the readings for this day because I really do not know who they are.

But the first question which I think is of more concern for us today. What does any of this have to do with our celebration of Advent? The key to all of it, I think is in verses 34 through 36 of the passage with words like, "Be on guard" "Don't be weighed down" "Don't be caught unexpectedly" "Like a trap" and my favorite one which I took for my sermon title for today, "Be alert" "Be alert;" so keeping all these cautions in mind when we explore this passage from Luke's Gospel.

First of all, Luke sets all these words, believe it or not, in the context of the story of the widow's mite which we shared a few weeks ago during our stewardship campaign. He tells the story at the beginning of chapter 21 in pretty short order making this point about stewardship and then he sort of takes off in a chapter long tangent about the temple itself which is the setting for widow's mite story. Now not going into huge detail, what I can say is that Luke uses language which is pointing to the eventual destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans. He also speaks about another incarnation; of another

coming of Jesus into the world what we in Christian circles call Jesus' Second Coming; a coming which is vividly described in verse 27 with Jesus returning to the earth in a cloud, with power and in great glory. A coming which Christians have believe for centuries that in some way was to complete the work which Jesus began in what we call the first incarnation; so to speak, to wrap up history; to wrap up all the loose ends so that all will finally be made right between us and with our fellow human beings; between us and our God and again the question remains why? Why the passage for Advent. Why the Second Coming; when we are preparing to celebrate the first coming of Jesus?

First I am going to ensure you, that I am not planning to go into any of the details of the timeline of the end of time, whatever or whenever those details are; because not only do I know very little about that timeline but I take very seriously Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 24; "About that day and hour no one knows; not the angels of heaven, nor the son but only the Father, only God." Which leaves us then with verses 34 through 36 again and of the idea of being alert; being on guard; being unencumbered; meaning not trapped; for they not only apply to Jesus' Second Coming but, also to Jesus' first coming at Christmas time; they apply to all of life that we live day by day. Now obviously we will want to spend time in the next few weeks preparing for our Christmas celebration not only materially but also spiritually as we study, as we worship, as we pray as we reflect.

Jesus in Luke's Gospel says to be alert and that takes us to a whole new level of preparation when it comes to living out our lives of faith on a daily basis of which I spoke. To being alert assumes some sensitivity about life as I mentioned before. It assumes an awareness about all of our surroundings, awareness about the issues of our day, an awareness of the needs and feelings of all the people around us; an awareness of God's working in our midst to bring us good news to each one of us. Of course it is possible to be too alert; to be too sensitive as I said to Cory, which can lead us to be kind of prickly and easily hurt by the people and events around us. But I would wager that for most of us, the opposite is true; we are so caught up with the trivial things in life that we are afraid of being complacent; about looking too closely at the issues our day and the people around us and the working of God in our midst that we are like the disciples at Gethsemane not even being able to watch with Jesus for an hour; kind of asleep at the switch as we go through the daily routine so to speak. So this passage encourages us, I think, in the midst of the busyness of our homes; the busyness of work; the busyness of school to be alert; to be on watch; to live life as if Jesus is coming the second time, tomorrow not some time down the road. Not as if a hammer is hanging over our heads; not with a sense of dread but instead with a sense of urgency; a sense of energy; sense of enthusiasm of the great work that we as Christians are called to do in God's world; to show in our words; to show in our deeds; to show in the very way we live our

lives, the love of God had for us in Jesus. The love of God still has for us in the coming of his son into the world for us as Christians. So we are encouraged to be sensitive, to be alert, and to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ Child into our midst. We are also encouraged not to stop there instead we are encouraged to live our lives as if there is no tomorrow, showing the love of God in the world, showing the love of God for all we are worth by every single ounce of our being. So we are encouraged today to be alert, because God really does love all of you lerts out there in the congregation. Take that love that God has for you, to see where you can fit it into the things that you do every day. Together we say AMEN.