

**“It’s Not the End of the World. It’s Just the
Beginning of a New Day”**
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***First Presbyterian Church
Wilkes-Barre, PA
Luke 21:25-36***

A man was staying in a chalet in the Swiss Alps. Early one morning he heard what sounded like an earthquake. He quickly got out of bed and ran to the front desk. He asked if something was wrong, if the mountains were breaking up? He was terrified!

The desk clerk explained, “Sir, we are on the west side of the mountain. As the sun comes up in the east, the snow and ice expand as they begin to warm. The expansion causes a large crashing noise. It’s not the end of the world. It’s just the beginning of a new day!”

I love that “It’s not the end of the world. It’s just the beginning of a new day!” – with all its loud crashing – It’s just the beginning of a new day!

Now of course if this Alps visitor had recently seen Roland Emmerich’s latest film “2012” he could be excused for fearing that the world was ending. No doubt his strength would have been greatly diminished – what with seeing all that devastation to our earth and our population! The Apocalyptic destructive scenario – Mr. Emmerich has gotten down to a science, from “Independence Day” to “Godzilla” to “The Day After Tomorrow” and of course his, “Armageddon.” After “2012” though what’s left? (Although, Noah would break a smile.)

I made it a point to see “2012”, this “End of the World” pic, somewhat based on an ancient Mayan legend, that itself is highly questionable – in fact totally questionable. Without going into detail, remember, with all the noise, “It’s not the end of the world. It’s just the beginning of a new day!”

But, if you must – check out Dr. Malmström of Dartmouth College, on the web. Search for “The Astronomical Insignificance of Mayan date 13.0.0”

I enjoyed the Wall Street Journal’s take on this “destructo drek.” “This oafish epic about the End of Days as predicted by the Mayan calendar operates in a dead zone roughly equidistant between parody and idiocy.” “2012” lasted two and a half hours. I was praying that the world would end so I could get out of the theatre. (Just kidding, sort of.) I so wanted to stop watching that forever and ever and ever annihilation of our world and the people on this fragile planet.

There are things to watch for – such as Advent! It’s that time again to get ready to prepare – to watch – liturgically, spiritually, as well as making your lists and checking them twice.

We are living in stressful and uncertain times. We are worried about terrorism. We are worried about the worldwide financial situation. We are worried about the high level of unemployment. We are stressed about so many issues in our lives.

Many are stressed out. And my friends, our faith has a word for you about all of this. A magnificent word that has changed the face of our world, changes individual lives every day.

Advent – reminds us!
Advent – renews us!
Advent – refreshes us!

Life, your life is in God's hands! Remember when you're feeling totally stressed – "It's not the end of the world. It's the beginning of a new day!" Possibilities! Potential!

It's Advent!

Dare to believe – to remember what transpired on that new day – 2,000 years ago! What continues to transpire, in faith at the beginning of each new day!!

I love Advent and Christmas!! This season promotes, culturally, spiritually, the optimism and hope of our Christian faith!!

Perhaps you need a good dose of Christmas Spirit and I'm not talking about what comes out of a bottle. The Christmas Spirit is omnipresent, if you watch for it; feel it, find it, live it! Which brings us to this morning's Lukan text.

Did you catch the gospel reading this morning for the First Sunday in Advent? Especially that first phrase.

"And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world..."

Now this passage was written to explain not the birth of Jesus into this world, but the second arrival of Jesus Christ back into this world. The early church describes the birth, the advent of Jesus in Matthew and Luke, in opening chapters.

In Luke 21 the author is describing another advent of Christ. There is symmetry here, for the early Christians and for us today. The birth, the advent of the Christ, of hope of reconciliation, is a continuing event.

Watching at all times!

And much more is transpiring in this particular passage. In a very real sense the apocalyptic imagery in Luke 21 could have been used in Luke 1, or in the New York Times circa November 29, 2009, or The Times Leader, or The Citizens' Voice. First Luke 21 has wedded together the tragic and destabilizing fall of Jerusalem in the late first century, with the overall recognition that much of human history seems out of control, without meaning and falling into oblivion with humanity in tow.

Apocalyptic literature is born out of crisis. Its imagery is terrifying! It speaks to the hearers of cosmic events that would frighten Anne Rice or Roland Emmerich or Stephen King. Of helplessness and destruction permeating the world. Of historical events that would take our breath away. And (get this!) – Of hope! Yes, Hope!!

You will never read any piece of Christian Apocalyptic literature devoid of hope.

You see – It's not the end of the world. It's just the beginning of a new day!

The early Christian Churches in the mid to late first century, some 40-50 years after Jesus ministered on earth, were experiencing life, remembering the first Advent of Jesus, and anxious for another. Is it surprising that hope, meaning, as seen and experienced in Jesus Christ, is longed for, hoped for, in the lives of his followers?

Is it of any surprise to you that we ritually – liturgically – yearly put aside four weeks to recall, to Re embrace the coming of Jesus Christ, our Hope, our meaning? Apocalyptic literature, in all of its imagery and symbolism, interprets the world in crisis.

Thus friends, Watch at all Times!

It seems to me that's why this imagery remains to this day, because some where in this world there is crisis, and, particularize it, within each heart, there are times of great crisis!

Apocalyptic grips us as people belonging to groups – i.e. nations, ethnic identities, classes, etc. and as individuals – “I'm all alone.” “How can this happen to me?” “After all these years, why now?”

Crisis!

Crisis!

You know it!

You feel it!

“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars”

Go beyond this literalism. Don't you sense what's going on in this passage? For when you see, experience the ... “signs in sun and moon and stars” (crisis) don't give up – do not fall into a stupor, do not resign your self to the fates...do not give up on life, on history...on the future. Advent is near! My friends – Watch at all times! That means you are expecting something. For when these things happen (and they will, they do!) look up and raise your heads, because your redemption, your hope is drawing near.

Know this – the Christian Apocalypse – redeems the world, creation! God is in Christ. We wait! We watch! For “It's not the end of the world. It's just the beginning of a new day! Advent!

Amen.