

Reflection on the Gospel-1st Sunday of Advent Year C
(Luke 21:25-28, 34-36)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Today's gospel passage, with its vivid description of the end-time signs, may seem a strange choice of reading for Advent and the beginning of the Church year. Its depiction of global devastation has a particular resonance in a post-industrial world faced with climate crisis. Some may be tempted to interpret "apocalyptic" events of today as the judgement of an interventionist God. This is far from the truth. **Our mindless exploitation of planetary resources has brought its own judgement and we must struggle together to save our planet from further destruction.**

Advent and Christmas are about the coming "in power and great glory" of the One who brings the liberation of God. The earliest Christians believed that Jesus would soon return and bring everything to completion. Some decades after Jesus' death, Luke's community had come to realize that the "final" coming of Christ was not just around the corner as they had expected. They needed to be reminded that a delayed return was no excuse for lack of vigilance. Luke warns against activities and attitudes that de-sensitize the heart or the human spirit. For Luke, **an attentive heart and constant prayer for the strength to withstand whatever comes is the proper stance for the Christian believer. An attentive heart will be attuned to the cry of the earth and the cry of those rendered poor by those who exploit the goods of the earth.** The image of Jesus coming on the clouds belongs within an ancient understanding of the structure of the world in which God and God's heavenly court are located in the heavens above. It might function in our times as a reminder that the **Incarnation, "God's becoming material" (Karl Rahner), is an ongoing cosmic event, not just a once-off event limited to one place and one time.**

We might do well to read this gospel passage against the backdrop of today's first reading from Jeremiah that looks to the fulfillment of God's promise of the **"virtuous branch for David"**. The organic metaphor of the **branch reminds us of the interconnectedness of God's people and of all being across the ages.** The virtue of the expected descendant of David finds expression in **honesty and integrity, literally "justice and righteousness/right relationship"**. Justice in the Hebrew tradition is about redress in the law courts for the most vulnerable. Righteousness is about right relationships as well as the equitable sharing and proper use of Earth's resources. **Justice and righteousness are two sides of the one coin. Where they are absent, there is no liberation.** Our prayer and practical action this Advent might embrace the plight of the earth itself and the concerns of those who yearn for liberation from various forms of oppression. **We might remember those seeking asylum among us and those who have been granted refugee status yet still await the justice of resettlement among us.** Our Advent could make a difference to their Christmas.

Ritual

Leader:

“An attentive heart and constant prayer for the strength to withstand whatever comes is the proper stance of the Christian believer.” So let us begin with a heart presence meditation.

In silence, let us become attentive to our breath... to divine presence that fills us and surrounds us completely...

We now place awareness on our heart centre... we hold this for a few breaths, noticing the space between each breath as well as the resonance of the heart.

Let us allow our heart to be attuned to the cry of Earth and the cry of those rendered poor... let us now bring one example of one of these cries close to us... feel this cry entering our heart space...

We hold this as we are reminded that ‘Incarnation, “God’s becoming material” (Karl Rahner), is an ongoing cosmic event, not just a once-off event limited to one place and one time.’ Our world is full of this sacred becoming and our life’s actions form part of this.

Allow the breath to move those cries through and out of your body... then after a few breaths we can open our eyes.

Video: Poem by Rilke “Let this darkness be a Belltower”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9waa9Q-RZxQ>

Period of contemplative silence.

Leader: As we listen to the Gospel and the reflections, what is arising? (allow 3 mins silence followed by contemplative dialogue in small groups or whole group).

Period of contemplative silence

Leader: We hear the Gospel’s ‘warning against activities and attitudes that de-sensitize the heart or the human spirit’ and we resolve to remain alert, attentive and aware in the collapse.

All: We offer our attentive hearts...

Leader: we remember those places and species under threat in the unravelling of Earth now. We remember those seeking asylum among us waiting for justice.

All: We offer our attentive hearts...

Leader: We remember that "Acknowledging that the world as we know it is coming apart is an act of courage." (Joelle Gergis, IPCC lead author, 2022)

All: We offer our hearts...

Leader: As we co-create the "virtuous branch of David" we know that "We are each part of an eternal evolutionary force that can transform our world." (Gergis)

All: We offer our attentive hearts...

Period of contemplative silence

Song: *The Grace of our Tears* by Kathy Sherman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRUFdxjECeg>

May the grace of our tears

Wash away your fears

May our tears fall like rain upon Earth

And make a garden grow

And make a garden grow.