

## "Heads up!" Luke 21:25-36 Populus Sion 2023

"Heads up!" Balls flying into crowds are not uncommon at baseball games. At the ball games I would attend with my father, the ushers blew a whistle whenever a ball was coming towards us. That shriek was a warning: "Incoming baseball. Heads up!" At the same time, that whistle blast was a cause of genuine excitement for fans like me. "A ball is coming my way. Maybe I'll catch it and get to take it home!"

I'm sure you're glad that I'm not in the habit of throwing baseballs at you while I preach - though it would keep you on your toes. Thankfully Jesus himself works hard to keep believers on their toes and ready for his return. In our text today we'll see how Jesus calls out: "Heads up!" - a cry that is both Advent warning and Advent rejoicing.

Jesus spoke the words of our text just days before his crucifixion. The disciples had been gushing about how wonderful the temple building was so Jesus told them that one day not one of those stones would be left standing on top of each other. Stunned, the disciples wanted to know when this would happen. After speaking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus told his disciples about the coming end of the world. He said: "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Luke 21:25, 26).

Just as God wants us to recall his promise never to send a world-wide flood again whenever we see a rainbow, so whenever we observe or experience a natural disaster like the earthquake and tsunami that devastated the northern coast of Japan in 2011, God wants us to recall that Jesus is coming to judge the world. These natural disasters will only increase in number and power as the end draws closer. They will be so bad that people will faint, even die from fear – especially when the sun

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stops shining and the stars fall from the sky (Matthew 24:29). When such disasters happen it's a warning from God: "Heads up! My Son is coming back to judge the world. Are you ready?"

Oh, I'm sure you feel ready. You're here in church, right? You know that this world will not last forever. You know that Jesus is coming back. The disciples too knew those things and yet Jesus saw fit to further warn them and us: "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with [carousing], drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap...36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:33, 36).

Everyone knows that you shouldn't text while driving or even while walking. So why do so many people do those things? It's because they think that they can safely multitask even though others can't and shouldn't. Are we spiritually like these people? Do we think we can keep one eye on the look out for Jesus while pouring our time and energy into making the starting line-up, earning a bonus, or watching the latest hits on YouTube? This desire to become popular and to remain relevant to our friends can lead to the more obvious sins that Jesus speaks about in our text: carousing and drunkenness.

Then again you might not be a partier, but are you a worrier? Jesus also warns against this sin of letting our hearts be weighed down by the anxieties of this life. It's good for you to watch what you spend and watch what you eat but if you watch these things more closely than you watch for Jesus' return, his appearance on Judgment Day will snap down on you like a metal trap breaking the spine of a mouse that was most concerned about filling its belly with cheese.

How do we guard against becoming distracted? "Be always on the watch" Jesus said, and pray. If you're not in the habit of praying through

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the Lord's Prayer daily, start doing so. When you get to the petition: "your kingdom come," pause and add: "Today, Lord? Are you coming back today?" Then think about all you have planned for the day and ask yourself, "If Jesus was to return at 10 am, would I eagerly welcome him or would I be embarrassed by what I have planned then? And what if he came at 10 pm?"

Perhaps I'm making it sound as if Judgment Day is a day to be feared because Jesus is like a strict teacher determined to catch us being naughty. That's not the view Jesus wants us to have of him or his return. Instead, he said: "When these things [natural disasters] begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:28-31).

When natural disasters hit, Jesus is calling out: "Heads up!" but that's not just an advent warning; it's also cause for advent rejoicing. The parable that Jesus told is perfect in helping us understand that the signs of the end times are good for believers. In the parable Jesus said that when we start to see leaves appear on the trees, we know that summer is right around the corner. Likewise, the signs of the end times mean that eternally bright, warm, summer-like days are ahead! Aren't those especially welcome words for us frozen-all-the-time Canadians! Sure, our winter came earlier this year and the weather people are telling us it's going to be a colder, snowier one than last year but the truth is we're in the season of spring, eternally speaking. We know this because the world has been experiencing natural disasters for a couple thousand years now. Jesus is coming! Lift your head up in joyful anticipation just as you eagerly await the arrival of summer.

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But can we really look forward to that day of judgment? What about all the sins that we have committed? What about the lousy job we have done honoring Jesus with our wealth and our talents? What about how we often serve with impure motives? Won't Jesus have something to say about those sins? Judgment Day will be a terrifying day to many when the sun stops shining and this earth completely breaks into pieces signifying God's wrath over all the evil here. But what I find interesting is how the sun already stopped shining once and at that time there was a great earthquake that split open rocks. Do you remember when? Jesus' crucifixion. Those "natural disasters" were quite appropriate because Good Friday was Jesus' judgment day. On that day he was being punished for the sins of the world. The blood that Jesus shed on that day, blood which we will receive in Holy Communion, vaccinates us against any harm that ought to come to sinners on our Judgment Day.

Yes, Jesus wants believers in him to look forward to his coming. He said: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:27). The word "redemption" means to "buy back." Didn't Jesus redeem us when he died on the cross so what does he mean that our redemption is only now drawing near? If you went to the humane society this afternoon just to look around but was then moved to buy all the animals there, you wouldn't take them home right away even though you had paid for them. In fact, it might be some time before you can fix up your house or purchase an acreage where you would have room for all those animals. But when all was ready you would come back for them. Likewise, Jesus already paid for our sins at the cross but he's now preparing a place for us. When it's ready, he will return to take us home to the wonderful place.

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So, heads up! Next time it might be Jesus flying into your life. Will you be ready for him? He's getting ready for you. And so, we pray:  
"Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us first through Word and Sacrament that we may remain ready to receive you on Judgment Day as our Savior and King." Amen.