

Text: [Luke 21:25-36 \(CEB\)](#)

Date: December 1, 2024 – 1st Sunday of Advent

Title: “Preparations”

Theme: Advent isn’t about preparing for what’s to come – it’s about living with what already is!

1

“Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.”

I generally try to live by that

I don’t know about you, but I know it’s not hard for me to
anticipate the worst that could happen

My mind just naturally goes there

And especially now

I feel like there’s so much fear and anxiety just free-floating in the
world

That it’s sometimes hard to feel secure

If you’ve been through a health scare this year

Or if you’ve struggled with your finances

If you’ve been let down by your relationships

Or by the powers that be, wherever they may be – at work, in
government, in institutions, in the church

It can be hard to imagine something better

2

And so, we might come into this season feeling a bit depleted

Maybe Thanksgiving was good

But looking ahead to Christmas feels like getting ready to run a
marathon

Christmas lights, and trees, and cookies, and wrapping, and
shopping, and cooking, and parties

Sometimes, unless we are very intentional to cultivate joy along
the way

We find ourselves preparing for Christmas like it *really is the worst*
Like Grinches and Scrooges who are just trying to get through it

3

I'm not sure that today's scripture helps us cultivate the joy we're
looking for

We come expecting that we're going to hear about preparations
for the birth of a cute baby

And instead end up with a full-grown Jesus going on about the
end of the world

Talk about preparing for the worst!

But Advent is *a/ways* operating on multiple levels

It's just that we usually end up focusing on the arrival of a baby –
because that's what's easier for us to grasp

That part we understand

We're looking forward to Jesus' arrival in the world

But the part of the story that Jesus is pointing to here is a lot
harder

Because it requires something from us beyond just waiting

What if the thing the world needs right now is NOT people who
are preparing for the worst

Not a Church operating out of our anxiety and fear about what
might happen

But instead those who are actually preparing for the best
By living out what we already know & believe?

It seems to me the start of Advent is a lot like Good Friday in that sense

We can't pretend we don't already know the rest of the story!
That the kin-dom of God has come – and is already here

4

When EVERYTHING feels unsettled

The way we get through it is not to spend all our time anxiously waiting for God to make things right, and wondering how much *worse* things might get before God shows up

We don't get there by *hoping* for the best, but *preparing* for the worst

But instead, I want us to be able to do what Jesus says to do:
“When these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near.”

To live in confidence, knowing what God has ALREADY done

The disciples wanted to know how bad things were going to get
And how they'd know when God was ready to redeem it

Not that much different from us, really

We begin to focus on all the BAD signs the world has to offer us
And believe me, I get it

There are many

Signs in the heavens, signs on the earth

But Jesus says, “Look at the fig tree”

“When you see it in leaf, you know summer is coming”

Here's a *different* kind of sign, he says

A more hopeful one

And THAT'S the one you look for

Not one that is pointing to the worst that could happen
But reminding us to live into the *very best* that we can imagine!
“When you see this, then you know the kin-dom is near”
And, Jesus says, THAT’S what you want to focus on

5

We can choose to prepare for Christmas by waiting anxiously for
something good
Or we can live into the good that’s already here
And live into what we already know is true
Christ is born!
God has already redeemed us by stepping into this world

We don’t have to constantly prepare for the worst
Or become fixated on the signs that point the way to despair

For us, it’s not just about EXPECTING the best
It’s about LIVING as though it’s already arrived
BECAUSE IT HAS

We live out the values of Christ’s kin-dom
A generosity of spirit toward all people
A deep commitment to peace and forgiveness
And above all, hearts that reach out in love

When we live this way, we become the leaves on the fig tree that
Jesus asked his disciples to look for
The signs of the future that’s already arrived
We don’t have to wait

So my question is: would someone looking at our lives recognize
the signs that summer is near?

Have we lifted up our heads so we're living not just from that hope
But from that deep conviction that Christ is born in Bethlehem?

I know there are days when that way of living seems to go against
everything we see around us

To forgive in the face of hurt

To be generous when others hold back

To love even the most unlovable

These are difficult things to do

But they are the signs that the world needs to see

Advent doesn't need to be waiting

And hoping for the best while anxiously preparing for the worst

Let's live like we already knew how the story turned out!

Go forth to bless someone today

So that they might look at your life as evidence

That the summer is on its way!

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ