

“Are you one of ‘waiting people’?” Luke 21:25-36

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

Today we celebrate the first Sunday in Advent. And Advent, as you know, means ‘coming’ or ‘arrival’. Coming of Christ, arrival of Christ. In this season of Advent we have a dual focus, on one hand, we remember the first coming of Christ, His indwelling in flesh and His birth, on the other hand, we are looking forward, we are waiting for the second coming of the Son of God.

Who then are we? We could say that Christians are ‘waiting people’, people who wait for sometimes extremely important, and something extremely joyful to happen. What are we waiting for?

We are waiting to see our God, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. We are waiting to see Him face to face as He is. Yes, He is the same person, who showed His love towards you by taking your death so that you can live. Now we are waiting to see Him, so we can express our gratitude and joy to Him personally.

That’s not all. We are waiting for new heavens and new earth, where there will be no more sin, no more pain, nor suffering, nor death. We are waiting for Christ’s eternal feast.

We are waiting to see multitudes of God’s chosen people, in new, resurrected bodies. Just imagine who you are going to see: Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel, Paul and other apostles, Martin Luther, many of your loved ones ... and countless number of other saints.

When you are waiting for good things, time goes faster; good expectations fill your life with joy and peace, for you know what is going to happen. Sure, we can't picture the whole beauty and majesty and joy of what is to come.

But we can pray the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and to give us a glimpse of what is to come, as we wait to see our God and our Lord, Jesus Christ in His divine glory, in His eternal Kingdom.

In today's Gospel reading Luke has recorded what Jesus Himself told about the end times. This is important for us to know, so we know what is to come before our God returns.

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

How do you like this picture? It is not a pleasant picture. The powers of the heavens will be shaken. Just this week we have quite an experience, when only a few things were shaken.

Fires caused such a thick smoke that in Tanunda for a while we couldn't see the sky. At some moments it was even difficult to breathe. And, of course, electricity was out, and phones, and garage doors, and fridges...

Have you seen earthquake videos? We are used to life in this stable environment, with firm foundation under our feet, but then suddenly there is no firm foundation, everything that we deemed to be unshaken moves. We have no control over it.

God the Creator is the Lord over His creation, He has set the laws of nature, which we enjoy in peace and security, but before the end, He will give us signs, He will shake things which many believe are unshakable.

Then those, who have put their trust in unshakable creation, will be perplexed and fainting with fear. It is easy to understand why. The whole environment, the mighty laws of nature will be shaken. What can you do, you can't run away...

And only then, after these signs, people **“will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”** Jesus doesn't stop thinking and caring about everyone, even about those who reject Him and persecute His chosen people.

He tells about these signs of the end times, to give His little rebellious creatures one more opportunity to turn to Him. By commanding powers of creation, Jesus showed that He was true God, and at the end He will use creation to bring people back to Him, showing that nothing is permanent and unshakable except His Word and promises. Return to the Lord and live!

Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” This is good. What can we expect people to do, when the powers of heaven are shaken? Fear and panic seem to be logical choices.

What does Jesus suggest His people? Straighten up and raise your head! Yes, do this, for your redemption is close. If we live to experience these events, that’s how we are to react. For us, God’s children, these are the signs that our waiting is almost over.

A little bit and we’ll finally see our Lord. We have no idea how great and how majestic and how scary His coming will be, but we know that He comes to take us to Himself. He is coming for you! Nations will be in fear, but for us these will be the last days of waiting.

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. What does Christ mean by ‘this generation’. Whenever Luke records the words ‘this generation’ they refer to those who reject Christ and His Gospel.

Enemies of Christ and His Gospel, they will always be here, whatever hard we try. We may wonder, why didn’t people believe when they saw all the signs that Jesus did? Why didn’t they believe when they saw the signs done by the apostles – what else one could expect?

Why wouldn’t people turn to the truth and accept God’s forgiveness? How can someone ignore what God, what Jesus Christ has done in our history? Obviously they can. For our hearts are evil from early days, and there are no one righteous, no one who seeks true God, unless the Holy Spirit creates in us new hearts.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. How good is that? Jesus has said these words repeatedly. If there is something unshakable in this world, these are words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many think that the words of Christ as they are written in the Bible are not relevant for us anymore. So we don’t read them, we don’t want to understand them, and we don’t want to take them seriously, and obviously we don’t want to share them with others. For today we are smarter than those people before us.

But what about this? ‘Heavens and earth will pass away, but my words will not!’ It is in His words where Jesus reveals the truth about us and about Himself. About our sin and God’s wrath that it deserves, and about God’s mercy and forgiveness that is given to everyone in Jesus. In His words He reveals what is going to happen and what He has prepared for His disciples, for you.

“My words will not pass away.” This is such a wonderful statement. Everything in this world can change, even this world itself, the powers of heaven will be shaken, but what Jesus has promised to you, will remain unshakable.

You will be with Him, you will see Him as He is, you will feast at His table together with all God’s elect. If we need security about our future, and assurance that we can trust Jesus, here it is. In His own words, in His promises to you.

But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

Again, this is a very practical warning, as everything Jesus says. Watch yourselves! Usually Christians try to be good with dissipation and drunkenness. Sure there are exceptions. But generally we try not to go too far.

But cares of this life is what really get us. Sometimes we even don’t notice it in our busyness. There are so many things to do, so many things to care about, to obtain, to attend, no time for rest, no time for family, no time for friends, for hobbies.

And if there is some time, then priority is given to all the above... and there really is no time for Christ. No time to come where He invites us, no time to listen to Him speaking to us in His Word, no time to be in Christian fellowship.

This happens partly because we believe that this world is unshakable, and that this Christ will come sometimes... no one knows when. What is obvious, He never comes right after the sermon.

Therefore we will always have a time to turn to Him. So we tend to think. This is what destroys the faith. Because we can’t have faith on our own, that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

As long as we are in God’s presence, as long as we hear the Word, as long as we receive the Holy Communion, we keep receiving the Holy Spirit and He creates our faith. Without Him, our faith dies. Don’t take it lightly.

For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.

What is going to happen, will happen, and it will have impact to the whole earth, to all nations, tribes and languages. Therefore, stay awake at all times! Praying for strengths.

There is only one source of strengths and that is here - in the Lord’s presence, where He comes to strengthen you. This is where He gives you His Spirit, where

He comes and gets united with you in the Holy Sacrament, this is where we support each other on this not-so-easy path following Jesus.

This is the place where the heart of the Christ's Church beats. Where our Lord Himself is present. This is where the Holy Spirit is pumped into the body of Christ, in you. This is where body and blood of Jesus strengthens you to be His faithful followers.

We are 'waiting people', we know what we are waiting for, and this is something worth not only waiting for, but dying for. But even when we wait for the best things to happen, sometimes it can be difficult to wait alone.

This is why we come together to wait together, to encourage one another, to support, comfort and cheer up one another. For if we make it together, we'll also celebrate it together.

Blessed this advent time to all of you, 'waiting people'! Come, Lord Jesus, come! Amen.