

## Sermon: Watch for the Signs

I absolutely love this text from our Gospel reading today. That might sound a bit strange considering all the heavy warnings in it. As we hear the words of scripture, our Lord is talking about his second coming, which will be marked by signs in the sun, moon, and stars.

The distress of nations in confusion. The roaring of the sea and waves. People fainting with fear and apprehension, as the powers of the heavens are shaken.

Then we have Jesus who says that all of us need to watch ourselves, so that we don't let those signs weigh us down with indulgence, drunkenness, and all the cares of this life. He urges us to pray that we may have the strength to escape all the things that are going to take place.

Now, I don't love this text because I'm cruel. I love this text because in the middle of all those signs and warnings, our Savior says, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

It is so comforting, and the thing that turns up the volume on that comfort is the distressing things that surround it.

Comfort is for those who are amid pain, peril, and distress. Imagine arriving at a big family reunion and you see your grandma surrounded by her kids, grandkids, nieces, and nephews. She's talking, laughing, hugging people. She sees you, and her eyes light up.

The first thing you say to her isn't going to be, "Grandma, it'll be ok," because that would make her mind start racing wondering what's happened, what went wrong, or who got hurt.

You don't comfort someone who is already happy unless you are about to give them distressing news. Comfort is for the distressed.

That is why Jesus doesn't sugarcoat the terrible signs that will coincide with his return. If he had, the fact that those signs point to your redemption drawing near wouldn't be nearly as comforting.

So, during the hatred, wars, and natural disasters we see in our day, straighten up and raise your heads because it all points to your coming redemption. And it is coming.

Throughout the week as I was praying, studying the text, and preparing for this sermon, my plan for how I was going to preach it took an abrupt turn.

Jesus spoke these words to the disciples, “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” So, in the past, I’ve preached this text in such a way as to get you to focus on that verse.

I still want to do that, but this time I want to take that one step further and talk about what these verses have to say about sharing the Gospel with others.

2 Cor. 1:4 says, “The God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

The comfort Jesus gives in this text is for all of us as Christians. And that comfort is meant to be shared with everyone who is troubled by the cares of this life. I am sure that we all have those, whom we know need the comfort of a smile, a telephone call, a prayer, or just company.

The Advent season is a good time to meditate on the fact that we are waiting and hoping for Jesus’ return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

What do you do while you wait for things?

A lot of the time, what we do when we wait has nothing to do with what we are waiting for. You sit in your car waiting for your child to come out of school or practice and check your email, send that text message you’ve been avoiding, or any number of things.

Maybe it would be good to ask yourself during that time, “What can I do with my time while I wait for Jesus to return?”

What would God have me do with all the turmoil in the world?” We need to look around.

Jesus says that “on the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken”, and he warns against focusing on the cares of this life.

How many people do you interact with that are caught up fretting and worrying about the cares of this life? How many of them would be comforted with the fact that all the evil that surrounds them points to Jesus’ return and the day of redemption for those who believe in him?

Jesus says that the day of his return will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth, and for unbelievers, that day will come suddenly like a trap that snaps shut.

In other words, the people around you who aren’t Christians either are seeing or will see these signs and rightly fear what is going on in the world.

So, as believers, we need to use those signs to point others to the fact that Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the redeemer of all mankind, is coming back to gather his selective sheep to dwell with him forever.

Let me try an analogy on you. And this analogy comes with a warning. All the signs Jesus mentions point you to your redemption. So, these signs should cause you to get excited in anticipation of your Savior’s return.

But for those who don’t have faith, these signs will cause fear and foreboding. This analogy is meant to encourage you to use that fear and foreboding as a tool to point people to the coming redemption. Here’s the analogy:

Imagine you are on a ship in the middle of the ocean that has struck an iceberg and is sinking. The bow of the ship is already under water. There are fires because the stoves in the kitchen have tipped over. People are running around screaming. The ship and all the passengers are in complete chaos.

But you've heard the captain on the radio talking with another ship that is coming to rescue every passenger on board. You can even see it off on the horizon. You know it's coming full speed to save everyone onboard, but you also know that it's going to be a while before it arrives at your location. Others on your ship either can't see it, or, if they do see it, they're convinced that it isn't coming to rescue them. What would you be doing?

Well, you would do everything you could to encourage everyone, and give them hope saying, "Just hang on. Our rescue is on its way! They're coming. Stay calm. Act reasonably."

You'd be helping people into the lifeboats. You'd break things that would float that people could use after your ship sinks to the bottom of the ocean.

Everything you do and say would be driven and motivated by the fact that your rescue is soon to come.

That is your calling as a Christian. Encouraging people to persevere because the rescue ship is on the way with Jesus, the Savior, at the helm.

When someone is weighed down by the cares of this life – whether it's things they see on the news; problems with their health, family, or job; natural disasters; whatever – all of that is an opportunity to confess your hope and confidence that Jesus is returning, and your redemption is drawing near.

The cares of this life are certainly real and ominous, but they completely pale in comparison to the redemption that is coming and drawing near. The ship of this world is sinking below the waves, and the more you encourage others and point them to Christ, the more firmly you will believe it. And the more firmly you believe it, the more you will tell others too.

Amid the evil of this broken world, straighten up. Raise your heads. Your redemption is coming and drawing near.

The hope of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.