

There *Will* Be Signs!

[Text - Luke 21:25-36]

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Throughout his ministry, Jesus declares that the Divine Realm is at hand - that a momentous era of Compassion and Peace is coming; and in fact, has already arrived in this world. That's definitely a bold proclamation, particularly considering the condition of the world in which Jesus lives. His homeland is occupied by an oppressive Roman army; his people are harshly treated and heavily taxed. Many of his fellow religious leaders - who are supposed to be caring for people and easing their burdens - seem more interested in condemning, controlling, and oppressing them. Yet Jesus has the audacity to confidently announce that the Holy One's liberating and gracious Realm is right there within people's reach.

Now, the thing that makes Jesus' proclamation both believable and authentic, is the fact that he himself *embodies* that Divine Spirit of Welcome, Love and Peace - in the *midst* of extremely distressing circumstances. When presented with widespread suffering, Jesus responds with uplifting compassion and healing. When confronted by injustice and intolerance, he passionately advocates for the poor and vulnerable, the outcast and the oppressed. And when threatened by the forces of hatred, violence, and fear, Jesus responds with a remarkable Spirit of love, forgiveness, and grace.

In the person of Jesus Christ, the Divine *Word* - the Holy Expression of all that is Good and Just - is wrapped in human form and lives among us. Jesus comes to make a decisive difference in this world, by bringing good news to the poor, release to the captive, and wholeness to those whose lives are broken and hurting. *Advent* is a time for you and me to remember and celebrate the arrival of that Good News, and to do what *we* can to make that Good News a reality in our world today. Because even though Advent is a time of anticipation and waiting, there are certainly different ways in which you and I can wait. We can sit and wait doing *nothing*; or we can wait like those who eagerly look forward to the arrival of a special person or a spectacular event. We can actively prepare ourselves and our surroundings for that Promised Day of Divine fulfillment - and by *doing* so, perhaps even help usher-in its arrival!

You and I can stand-up for the poor and hungry and helpless, using our gifts and resources to feed, assist, and encourage them. We can act-out as genuine children of our One Heavenly Parent, by reaching-out to *all* of our sisters and brothers with welcome, acceptance, and kindness. We can speak-out against bigotry and injustice, and advocate for more peaceful and constructive uses of our nation's riches and resources. We can remind our so-called "evangelical" friends that defending the use of teargas against families seeking refuge might not sit well with members of the Holy Family, who themselves sought refuge in Egypt following Jesus' birth. In many ways, you and I can actively attend to Christ's concerns, by graciously caring for "the least of these, our sisters and brothers."

The Season of Advent presents us a variety of opportunities to help our neighbors in need - those both near and far. We can put hats and scarves and gloves on our Mitten Tree, to be distributed to others less-fortunate. We can provide gifts for students of the Prentiss Autism Center, to help brighten their holiday. We can always increase the pace of our year-round donations to our area food banks. And as a Church Family, you and I can make a special effort to watch-out for those around us for whom the holidays can be a sad or lonely time. Together, you and I can make a tremendously positive difference in this troubled world, one small step at a time; thereby promoting Christ's real and active presence in this world.

After all, that's the real purpose of this Advent and Christmas Season:

To remind us to watch for the signs - and to *become* the signs - of the Divine Realm of love, compassion, and peace;

To be prepared to do our own part, in making that remarkable Realm a living reality;

To remember that the Divine Realm can begin with something as tiny as a newborn baby;

And then be prepared to watch that Realm grow and deepen and spread, right before our very eyes!