

This message was delivered by Rev. Pamela Graf Short to the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church on the first Sunday of Advent, December second, in the year of our LORD two thousand and eighteen.

Below you will find all the lectionary texts for this day.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

33:14 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

33:15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

33:16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Psalms 25:1-10

25:1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

25:2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

25:3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

25:4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

25:5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

25:6 Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

25:7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

25:8 Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

25:9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

25:10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

3:9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?

3:10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

3:11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.

3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

3:13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 21:25-36

21:25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.

21:26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

21:27 Then they will see 'the Son of Humanity coming in a cloud' with power and great glory.

21:28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

21:29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees;

21:30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

21:31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

21:32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

21:33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

21:34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly,

21:35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

21:36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Humanity."

In our Bible stories for today “God breaks through”.

In Jeremiah

God breaks through the misery of injustice
with a branch so mighty
it bends and shelters all in need of safety.

In the Psalm

God breaks through the shame of enemy victories
with a steadfast love,
with a faithfulness so clear
it instructs us in who we really are.

In the Gospel

God breaks through
the sun
the moon
the stars
the nations
with signs so powerful that according to Jesus
only those passed out with drunkenness
or throwing up from a hangover will be able to miss what is happening.

In Sundays to come we will hear how the body of a babe with tiny arms broke through the womb of a woman
and brought us salvation.

In weeks to come

we will celebrate the holy arms of Jesus
breaking through our hearts with generous grace.

In moments to come we will turn soberly to the just and glorious arms of Christ
breaking through the clouds
and shaking the very powers of heaven
and all who live on the face of the whole earth.

I fear that I have not adequately prepared you to meet a God who breaks through.

There is nothing you can do to stop God’s coming, though some do pray that God waits until more have been
introduced to the love of Jesus.

There is nothing you can do to hasten God’s coming, though we pray with earnest anticipation
“Come LORD Jesus! Come!”

There is nothing you can do to set the clock for God’s coming.
The decision about the day and the hour remain hidden in the mind of God.

There is however much that you can do to meet the God who is coming, the God who breaks through.

In today's lectionary portion of Luke 21 Jesus gives us 5 commands:

Stand up

Raise your heads

Be on guard

Be alert

Be Praying

"Pray that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Humanity."

Where does strength come from?

If you wish to be physically strong,
you lift weights over and over and over again.

You walk miles and more miles.

You ingest foods that build up your cells: your organs, your muscles and your bones.

You take in clean water and clean air.

You avoid over consumption of

Ben and Jerry's and Jack Daniels and Stimels donuts. And you offer your body rest.

Still, for those caught in this week's earthquake, no amount of physical strength could offer them escape.

So what does it mean to have the strength to escape all these things that will take place?

Surely Jesus is referring to spiritual strength.

And where does spiritual strength come from?

Lifting

Walking

Ingesting

Avoiding

Resting

You know the drill:

You lift up your sins in confession and repentance and are embraced by God's arms of grace.

You lift up diseases in hope of healing and are met with God's caring touch.

You lift up justice making: You show mercy to the poor, the widow, the orphan and the immigrant.

You walk in the foot prints of Jesus, becoming like children which means some of your exercise may be skipping and jumping and dancing about.

You ingest truth through the Spirit and the Word.

You mutter over it.

You memorize it.

You study it.

And then there are things we avoid.
We avoid toxins like
pornography
and fear mongering
and greed
and arrogance
and gluttony
and drunkenness
and violence
and the rat race.

And we rest.
O that we would rest one day a week.

I like to shop. I like to buy stuff.
But will I stop shopping one day a week?

I am grateful for my work. It is meaningful work.
But will I stop working one day a week?

You see when we practice Sabbath;
when we rest from our labors and cease our scurrying;
when we take a moment to stand up in worship and raise our heads to look for Christ's coming
we might just nurture the spiritual strength needed to escape all these things that will take place.

So while spiritual exercise can be compared to physical exercise there is a whole other component needed for
spiritual strength.
That component is a relationship with God.

Spiritual strength is a common theme in scripture and it is always paired with God.

Psalms 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though
the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the
mountains quake with their surging.

Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe.

Nehemiah 8:10 Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Isaiah 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you
and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

"Pray that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place,
and [pray that you have the strength] to stand before the Son of Humanity."

There will come a time when each of us stands before the Son of Humanity.
You remember perhaps my account of my mother's concern when she was dying:
"What will I say to God when God asks me why I should enter heaven?"
"You say, "there is no reason for you to let me in except for your grace through the blood of Jesus".

If you want to have the strength to stand before the
Son of Humanity when Christ returns, then there is one more thing you must practice:

You must practice Alert humility.

I must be aware that God is God and I am not God. That sounds pretty basic,
but that is not always the way that I live.

Alert humility is a startling awareness of God's powerful and overwhelming presence of love.

We live in a world that is unaware.

A world that is numb. William Lamar says,

"It's as if some diabolical cosmic dentist injects us with Novocain" over and over again.

We have traded alert humility for escape from pain.

We have assumed because Christ has not returned for 2018 years that Christ will not return,
at least not in our lifetimes

and so we say "numb us up, Doc".

I don't want to feel the pain of children who are beaten or women who are assaulted.

I don't want to know the sensation of tears stinging my eyes when I see human beings hauled off as sex
slaves.

I don't want to sense the touch of anxiety that plagues the refugee whose home was blown up because
world leaders play chess games with human beings.

I don't want to feel what God feels.

And so we escape into work and play and food and drink and drugs and movies.

But I don't think Jesus command to us is to pray to escape the pain.

I think it is more likely that Jesus calls us to pray for strength to escape the escape;

to refuse the cultural Lidocaine and to let the tears of God drip onto our faces

and wake us up

and make us ready to meet Jesus.

Pray!

Be alert!

Be on Guard!

Raise your heads!

Stand up!

Prepare yourself because Christ is coming back and God will break through and you will stand before the
Son of Humanity.

On that day when God's arms gather all things up, let it be said that the people of Tontogany stood before
Christ with the strength of alert humility. Come LORD Jesus! Come!

Now may the Son of Humanity,
The One who is coming to redeem all creation
Gather you up in arms of love
And present you before God
in holy wonder
and blameless joy.
And until that day
may your hours and days and moments and years
be met with
Justice
Honor
Generosity
&
Peace
Come LORD Jesus! Come!