

There Will Be Signs November 28, 2021

Good morning, Church: the church that is here and the church that is there, wherever there is and whenever there is. I'm so very grateful that we have those options!

I want to read a passage of scripture today that comes from the book of Luke, chapter 21, beginning with verse 25. Jesus is speaking. He says, "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexed at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint with terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourself and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will come upon you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man." May God bless the reading of His Word.

A long, long time ago and a land far, far away; I don't think you guys have any idea how far it is between south-central Mississippi, early 1980s, and Richland, Washington, 2021. It's a long, long way and it has nothing to do with distance or time. I was in my first church. Just got there, actually. And early one Saturday morning, relatively early, I get a call. And the voice on the other end of the line says, "John, John, I seen 'em! I seen 'em! I seen 'em!" I said, "Whoa, hold on!" I thought it was a friend of mine by the name of Leon. I said, "Leon, is that you?" He said, "Yeah. I seen 'em!" I said, "Whoa, hold on now!" I couldn't tell if he was scared or happy. All I knew is he was he was in the key of gee whiz and I had to get him down. I said, "Leon, calm down. What did you see?" He said, "I seen 'em. You know, those big grasshoppers in Revelations. I seen em!" I said to him, "Hold on. Just take a deep breath. Take a deep breath and talk to 'em." Now, you have to know about Leon. Leon was a childhood friend. He is a biblical scholar and very interested in End of Days things and he knew the Book of Revelation upside down, backwards and forwards. And he said, "In the Book of Revelation, there's a passage that talks about great locusts that would come out of the earth, that had a great sting in their tail, and they will cause a great deal of pain and devastation on humanity." He said, "John, I seen 'em!"

Would you show the first slide, please? This is what he saw.



Now, this is a military armored vehicle transport helicopter and these things are absolutely massive. Let's show the next slide please.



This gives you a little bit of perspective. That is a full-sized tank. These things have the ability to light on top of an armored vehicle, grab ahold of them and pick them up and take them wherever the army wants them to be. As best as I can tell, this is what happened. A fleet of these beasts were being moved from one base to another and they stopped at the Air National Guard in Meridian, Mississippi, and my buddy happened to be driving by and he saw them. And he became absolutely convinced that was the start of Armageddon and Jesus' return was imminent. That was January or February, 1983. Now, drive a peg down there; hold on to it. We'll be back in a few minutes.

Can you believe that this is the first Sunday of Advent? The first Sunday of Advent, the first Sunday of the liturgical year of the Church and our very first Advent together. My, how time flies when you're having fun! Advent has come to be about looking back at the coming of Christ in His birth, but its original intention was to draw our attention toward His coming back, His Second Coming, His Advent, the Second Coming. In our passage of scripture from Luke, chapter 21, Jesus' disciples had asked Him, "What will be the sign that all these things are about to take place?" And He begins to tell them. If you read that whole chapter, there are a whole number of things that He says. There will be signs. Every generation, from the disciples forward, there has been a segment of that generation who believed they were living in the last times. If you will read the writings of the apostle Paul, his early writings, he believed that he would see the second coming of Christ with his own eyes. In his latter writings, he believed that he might not, but those he was writing to probably would. And every generation, from that generation on, believe that they saw signs of the End of Time, just like my buddy did. Jesus said, "There will be signs and there will be great upheaval on the whole earth." Hello, can you say pandemic? Folks, those of you who lived through World War II, who have a memory of that, a lot of that generation believed that was it. I remember when the first Iraqi war started. Because it was in the Middle East, I don't know what was going on out here, but

in the South there were a lot of folks who believed that because it was in the Middle East, that was the beginning of Armageddon. There have been others who believe that other different things that have happened were signs of the End of Time. Now, sooner or later, somebody is going to be right. Jesus said there will be universal upheavals, but then He continued to say, "But when you see these things, lift up your head. Pay attention." Because that's not bad news, that's good news for us. For those of us who believe in Jesus Christ, the end is not bad. I saw a mug not long ago (you learn a lot from coffee mugs), I saw a mug not long ago that said, "Brothers and sisters, I hate to spoil the ending for you but it's going to be okay. Love, your brother Jesus." It's going to be all right. Jesus said, "When you see these signs take place, lift up your head, pay attention." It's going to be all right. But be careful, because it's easy to get discouraged. It's easy to become overwhelmed. It's easy to allow the magnitude of what we are hearing in the news to pull us down. Jesus said, "If you see these signs, take courage. Don't be afraid." And yet there are many that have become discouraged. There was a statistic that came out a couple of weeks ago that said that during pandemic, as many as 38% of all clergy in the United States have considered getting out of ministry. In case you're wondering, I'm not one of them!

Now, what I'm about to tell you is my opinion. You all hear that? This is my opinion. It is my opinion that too many people have spent too much time trying to figure out when and how Jesus was going to come back. My opinion, right? You can spend your time doing worse things. But Jesus said He didn't know, and that kind of does it for me. Now, the story I'm about to tell you, I tell you in all reverence. It will have a funny ending, but it begins with all reverence. There was a gentleman that spent his entire adult life studying the Second Coming and End of Days things. He was a tremendous biblical scholar. He knew the Bible better than I ever will. He became absolutely convinced that he had made some major breakthroughs and discoveries and so he wrote a book. Nothing new about that. There are hundreds of books about the Second Coming. But this here is what was new: he said, "Jesus was right." Duh! "Jesus was right. Nobody knows the day or the hour when He's going to return, but I have narrowed it down to three days in September." I'm serious, three days in September. He was so convinced and he believed it so fervently. He was so sincere that he raised the money to have his book published and sent to every clergy in the United States. Do you know how many of us there are? That was mid-September, 1986. Unless I missed something, he was very sincere but very sincerely wrong. Now, here's the funny. That same three days my best friend and I had scheduled a backpacking trip outside of Pagosa Springs, Colorado, in the Weminuche Wilderness area. I went over to his house to pick him up, spent the night, where the topic of discussion was about this three days that we're going to be in Colorado that was when Jesus was supposed to return. And as we were leaving, his wife said, "Ron, if y'all are driving on those three days, I want you to make sure you're driving." He said, "What?" She said, "I want you to make sure you're driving so that when Jesus comes and gets John, you won't crash!" (Did I mention that's his ex-wife?)

The when of the Second Coming and the how of the Second Coming is not for us to know. What is for us to know, and here is one of the great takeaways, is that history is going somewhere. The light at the end of the tunnel is not a train, it is good news. The age will have a consummation. God will bring it to a glorious conclusion and it's good news for you and I. Jesus came and will come again. That is the first takeaway from

this. The second takeaway is equally as simple and yet still very profound: be prepared. Because one day, somebody is going to be right. The Christian is to live in a state of expectancy. Let me say that again. The Christian is to live in a state of expectancy, to live as if we are going to meet Jesus, because we are going to meet Jesus one way or another. Live in a state of expectancy day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out. Live with consistency and persistency. God honors consistency and persistency. And consistency and persistency are a lot harder than being a martyr. Right? Being a martyr, that's just (like a finger snap) but getting up every day and being ready, living consistently and persistently like that day may be **the** day. God rewards daily faithfulness. Here's an observation I've made. People often talk to me about what God's will is for their life. Here's what I've noticed. If every day you get up and you live with consistency and persistency, you will end up at the right place at the right time doing the right thing. God honors consistency and persistency. So, as we begin this Advent season, there are two things I want you to take home with you today. Number one: Jesus has come. Amen. Give thanks. Give thanks. Thank you, God, for the greatest gift ever given. And number two: Jesus will come again. Be ready. Be ready. Resolve in your heart and your mind to live every day in a state of expectancy, consistently and persistently. God has a plan. Jesus has come. Give thanks. Jesus will come again. Y'all, it's gonna be okay. Jesus said so.

Let's pray. During this quiet, we prepare our hearts and our minds to meet Jesus again, whether He comes for all of us collectively or whether He comes for us individually. Right now, let us pray.

Lord, for this season, we are so very grateful. We, Your children, worship You. We thank You for Your faithfulness and Your consistency. We thank You, God, for the gift of Jesus as we look forward to His coming again. May we live such lives that we would not be ashamed when He comes. May we live such consistent, persistent lives that when He comes, it will be good news. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.