



Sunday Reflection

Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 28 November 2021

Advent 1

As we move into Advent we prepare to see "the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory". Let us be mindful of that in our worship today.

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"Then they will see." Luke 21:27

An Illustration to set the scene

If you've ever tried to hold a two-way conversation in a crowded room you'll know that background noise can make it extremely hard to hear what the other person is saying, and to make yourself heard.

It's akin to reading scripture passages such as today's Gospel reading.

It can be hard to escape the clutter of our thoughts.

All kinds of images and ideas crowd in and it's all too easy to miss what Jesus is actually saying.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's reading from Luke Jesus says clearly that at the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple he will be revealed with "power and great glory".

These words have been used to mock Christianity, to suggest that Jesus was as deluded as every other power-crazed religious nutcase.

But is it warranted?

Consider these points:

Throughout the Bible, prophets warning of historical calamity used “*end times*” language, but this didn’t mean they thought a fundamental change was going to take place. They spoke like this to heighten their listeners’ emotions, deliberately mixing the “*now*” and the “*end times*” perspective.

There was also a considerable overlap between physical and spiritual realities. The word translated as “*heavens*” was also used for “*sky*”. In a thunderstorm, the heavens are literally shaken; sometimes, through fear or shame, we ourselves rightly or wrongly intuit God’s anger. So we shouldn’t automatically assume that the shaking of the heavens, for example, means the end of the world.

Moreover, the biblical world was where calamities were real events that stayed in the communal memory much more than they do today, when news pours in constantly. Earthquakes, *volcanic eruptions*, storms at sea, *an invading army* – these things brought utter destruction. So when prophets spoke of total upheaval they were describing what people knew in actual history – not simply at “*the end of the age*”.

Also, Jesus’ words, “*the Son of Man coming in a cloud*”, are thought to refer to Christ ascending rather than descending. It is we who may be overlaying his words with our own cultural background noise – with images of Jesus coming down to land.

So what is Jesus saying?

First, he is predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, which would be a cataclysmic event. It was precisely this. Jewish religion and culture were never the same again, and it happened within a generation.

Second, when Jesus points to the fig tree and says, “*You can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near*”, he may be saying that anyone can see where the combination of **Jewish nationalism** and **Roman power** is heading. The writing is on the wall.

Third, he predicts that in the midst of this cataclysm some will see, and be held firm by, a vision of the sovereignty of Christ. The destruction of Jerusalem shouts the supremacy of Rome. But some will look up and see a greater power and a greater glory – Christ coming in a cloud. It’s not that Christ has brought this calamity to be. Rather, through the calamity, he is the anchor.

Fourth, our response is to hold firm and look up – our redemption is near. But this means we must also be ready, because if we focus on the things of the world now, we shall not be ready to focus on Christ in the day of calamity.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

So how do we apply a political prophecy from two thousand years ago?

Are Jesus’ words simply locked in ancient history?

Not at all!

We all experience *“the end of the world”*.

It may come on a national or regional scale in the context of war or tsunami; it may come individually through mortal sickness or breakdown of one kind or another.

At times of calamity, we can also look and see Jesus. This is the *“Son of Man”* – flesh and blood like us – who has triumphed through his own calamity, the cross. So *“when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads”*.

Of course it's not easy to see above the fears that roar in our ears. But if we stay alert now, we're more likely to be ready then.

Christ is our anchor – if you look to him, he will come.

“Then they will see.” Luke 21:27

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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