

Stand Up and Raise Your Heads

C-Advent 1: Luke 21:25-26

Adult Sermon:

“Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

For me, this is one of the most challenging Gospel readings in our lectionary. If we read it literally, Jesus seems to be talking about “the end times,” the “second coming,” when things are very difficult and scary on Earth, and he will “come in a cloud with power and great glory.” And if we “stand up and raise our heads,” our “redemption,” our **journey to Heaven**, will draw near. Then Jesus says “when you see these things take place,” all the scary and intimidating things, “you know the Kingdom of God is near.” And, finally, Jesus says, “**this generation** will not pass away until all things have taken place.”

Well, about 60 generations have passed away since he said that.

So maybe Jesus wasn't talking **literally** about the “Kingdom of God” as “Heaven,” but instead more **metaphorically**. What could the “Kingdom of God” mean, from a more metaphorical perspective? When we hear and see distressful and scary things happening in our world, what does it mean to “stand up and raise our heads” so that **redemption** can happen? Could “redemption” mean something other than just us going to Heaven? When scary things are happening, and “the Kingdom of God is near,” could that mean **God's Kingdom of love** is near? Could it be about us being converted to **loving our neighbors** who are suffering, so we can pursue and bring about, the Kingdom of God, here on Earth?

Our reading from Jeremiah says God will “cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute **justice and righteousness** in the land.” And our reading from 1st Thessalonians says, “And may the Lord make you increase and **abound in love** for one another and for all . . .”

Any scary and distressful stuff going on in our world today that is causing suffering? Are their people being frightened and abused? Are their people trying to get out of their current world, and find a safer place where they and their kids could live a better and more meaningful life? Are we supposed to ignore and avoid and fear them?

Or are we supposed to “stand up, raise our heads,” and **do something** to love them?

One of Jesus' primary focuses in training his disciples and followers, was to make them aware of the needs of the people around them, and show them ways to stand up, raise their heads, and do something.

We are not yet perfect as the Church of Reconciliation, but we have done an amazing job of **stretching** through the years to **love our neighbors**, especially those who are being left out, ignored, and abused. Ironically, we are about to celebrate our 50th Anniversary, next week. I am so proud of Reconciliation, and all we have done over the last 50 years to stand up, and speak out for those in our world who were being rejected, abused, ignored.

But we are not perfect, yet. We are still, like most people, **blind** to many of the ways others are being left out, not respected.

I recently had an epiphany. As a **privileged white male**, I woke up to the reality that in many ways, woman are still not being treated equally, even at Rec. I think the news and turmoil from the Brett Kavanaugh hearing was part of what woke me up or reminded me of the reality that woman are still, in many ways, being treated as second class.

I realized that Rec has done a lot to support women and to elevate their leadership. But I also recognized we aren't **perfect** yet. So that's what motivated our new Advent Adult Formation Class, which is focused on **the role of women at Rec**, and the ways we may be still treating them as second class.

This Sunday we are focusing on all the ways women have been elevated and equalized in their leadership at Rec. But the second class in two weeks, we will focus on ways we are still "**blind**," ways women are still not treated as equal.

Part of the reason we are focusing on the role of women at Rec during the Season of Advent is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is a major focus in the season of Advent. We will be focusing on Mary, when we do our Lessons and Carols in three weeks. The Church has given lots of attention to Mary. But mostly because she was Jesus' mother. She is basically the **only woman** who has a major role in the early history of the Church.

Hopefully, we will all have "epiphanies" in the Season of Advent. Hopefully, we will all realize places where we have been blind and ignored the full inclusion of women.

Hopefully, we will "stand up, raise our heads," and keep growing and expanding our love, as the Church of Reconciliation in our next 50 years, for all our neighbors; for everyone.

Amen