

**Sunday, November 28, 2021**

**Luke 21:25-36**

**“Surely the days are coming...”**

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Earlier this year, a clip from the show America’s Got Talent went viral. Not so much because of the talent on display, though it was lovely. Nor because of the magic Golden Buzzer that the talent received. Don’t ask. You had to be there. The clip went viral because the woman auditioning, Jane Marczewski of Zanesville, OH, was at that moment dying from cancer of the liver, spine, and as she said, a few other places.

After she performed her song, Simon Cowell told Marczewski, who goes by the stage name Nightbirde, that no one would ever have known that doctors had given her a 2% chance of living, that rather than looking like she was on death’s door, she simply glowed.

Her response set the internet on fire. “Well,” she said “You can’t wait until life isn’t hard anymore to decide to be happy.”

And yet, that’s just what we so often do. And have done forever. Why else would Jesus have spent so much time admonishing his followers to stop procrastinating, to wake up, get up, stand up, just get out there and get after it?

In the interests of complete disclosure, no one has ever suggested that my personal grace gift is patience. But the truth is that I am all too often not present in the moment that I’m in. All too often I figure that I can wait to get after it until conditions are optimal. For instance: When looking at a closet full of clothes that have somehow magically shrunk a size, I might just say to myself, “Self, after the holidays, we’ll lose that pesky 10 pounds.

Or after Christmas, or Easter, or the annual report, or budget season, or whatever is currently consuming my time, that’s when I’ll get right on that next chapter of the book. Or I’m so tired. I’ll exercise after I take a nap.

Maybe you find yourself someplace in my procrastinations. Or maybe you can think of a few I haven’t mentioned. Whatever, it’s a way of putting off what you know you should be about in the world.

And the church is rightly famous for it. Many of my colleagues have noted over the years, the Presbyterian strategy of issuing a national statement about an urgent problem, Like for instance, the prevalence of guns in our communities. We nominate a committee to discuss the problem. We have many, many committee meetings to discuss the problem. We prepare a report summarizing our findings. We vote to accept the report. And then we retire to our homes, satisfied that something has been done. Meanwhile, guns continue to proliferate.

Luke’s Jesus draws a picture for us of the mess that we have on our hands. If you read this passage in the context of the entire chapter 21 of Luke’s gospel, you will hear a story that could have come out of this morning’s New York Times.

Wars and insurrections. Nation rising against nation, kingdoms against kingdoms. Earthquakes, famines, plagues. Dreadful portents and great signs in the heavens. Betrayals, brothers against brothers, parents against children. Refugees fleeing across the mountains, the deserts, the seas, running to escape violence, persecution, death. False prophets of every stripe and persuasion.

We could be forgiven if we agreed with Jesus' first followers that the proper course of action in times like these would be to hunker down in our pods, locking the doors, pulling the shades, hiding under the covers until times get better, waiting it out in safety until life wasn't hard anymore.

And that is what we've done. Not all of us or all the time. This church has continued its historic ministry to provide food and clothing for those who needed them. This congregation has made it a point to love another in the beauty of diversity. Through it all, this congregation has continued to provide space for organizations that stand for and with the addicted in our culture. These are good and important acts of mercy.

But the question facing us on this first Sunday of Advent 2021 with the world in the shape that it currently is, with our neighbors continuing to suffer food insecurity and a lack of decent affordable housing, with the curse of gun violence still abroad in the land, with ancient hatred and bigotries once again raising their ugly heads, the question facing us is this: If this were the last Sunday ever, how would Jesus want us to spend it? If we were to look up and in the midst of wars and rumors of wars, spot our Lord and Savior coming in the clouds with power and great glory, what would we want him to find us doing in his holy name?

Because this is the truth of the promised coming of the day of the Lord: there is no other time, there is no better time, no bigger time, no better resourced time than right now, to be about the business of loving God with heart and soul and mind and strength, and loving our neighbors as God has loved us—with every last ounce of time, talent, and treasure that we have.

There's an awesome meme out there that pastors frequently post on the first Sunday of Advent. It reads: Jesus is coming. Look busy.

If I knew how to alter memes, I would fix this one. Because it should say: Jesus is coming. Don't bother wasting time looking busy. Just get after it.

Out there in the midst of the chaos and agony of our world is where we are called to be, because that is where we will see Jesus present now and always coming. Out there with the poor and the lost, the lonely, the needy, the ones for whom Jesus came, the ones whom Jesus really does love best. Stand up, Jesus tells us, raise your heads, do not be weighed down with the worries of this life. Your redemption draws near—be about my business.

Because the coming of our Lord is the end of the world as we know it and that is the extraordinary good news of God. Tomorrow does not have to be just like yesterday. Children don't have to go hungry and sleep in the back seat of their mother's car. Old folks don't have to live isolated, alone, and afraid. Boys and girls and the children who claim both identities or neither don't have to be afraid that they are not enough for we as the body of Christ in the world can insist to them in word and deed that they are good and lovable just as they are, that God loves them because God is love and they are God's children.

We can't wait for life not to be hard to decide to live fully into the life and the purpose that God has given us.

People of God, Jesus is coming. And there's still so much to do. Let's get after it.