

First Sunday in Advent
Sermon Text: Luke 21:25-36
Related Text: psalm 25:1-10
Date preached: November 29, 2009
Note: Information mtg. about ELCA

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Whether it is good or bad there is always something next. When things in our lives start falling apart we may ask ourselves, “Now what?” I know for myself there are times when a string of bad things happen that I’ll start thinking something else bad will happen. It is a question that reflects the burden we feel when multiple things go wrong.

Some in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have felt this way over the past several months. The question “Now what?” was expressed in a variety of ways when we shared our responses to the survey questions. Many feel this is but the beginning of even more changes that will lead us further from Biblical truth.

Along with this there is an eagerness of making decisions, “What are we going to do about this?” “When will we make a decision?” “What’s next?” With these questions comes a desire to move ahead quickly as we have grown accustomed to doing in other aspects of our life. Our patience can be greatly

tested in such times, especially when it comes to waiting.

Any kind of waiting is hard. Some perceptions of waiting are that nothing is being done.

Such waiting can play upon our fears. There is the fear of change. Long before these changes in our denomination much more dramatic changes were referenced by the Gospel writers. The reading from Luke brings this out very vividly. There will be lots of signs that point to bad things happening that are beyond our control.

This calls to mind another fear. There are things that happen that are beyond our control. And when those things occur the temptation exists to do one of two things.

The first thing we might try to do is to seize control of the situation. Somehow we think that if we controlled things, we'd be in a much better circumstance. It ties in very closely then with the second temptation and that is to simply resign ourselves to saying that we are helpless. There is nothing that I can do.

Both temptations fall to the extreme. We either try to seize too much control, thus placing ourselves in the role of God or we simply become apathetic and do nothing.

The Gospel calls us to remember that while we may be helpless to the forces of sin, death and the devil, God has taken care of that for us. God has fulfilled the promise he made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah as stated in the reading from Jeremiah. God has caused a righteous branch to spring up. That righteous branch is Jesus.

By delivering us from our helplessness God has set us free to be active waiters. While we wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, God bids us to abound in love for one another.

Such love does not mean that we accept every behavior, nor does it mean that we tear one another down. Bearing witness to the good news of Jesus is to speak lovingly to one another. To bear witness to Jesus is to cloth ourselves in behavior that reflects our identity as God's children.

Examples of such witness abound. The history of the Lutheran Church is full of stories about times when we speak out for justice. Here at St. Paul's we did

that earlier this month when those gathered for Sunday school wrote letters to legislatures appealing for support for foreign food bill.

One of the lesser known publicized events coming out of our denominations Churchwide Assembly was the approval of a Malaria initiative. A core component of that initiative is the purchase of mosquito nets to prevent children in various African countries and communities from dying of malaria.

This week fifteen thanksgiving baskets were given to people in this community who otherwise would struggle to have a meal. These are but a few examples of what it means to live as God's children.

These examples portray a church that is in a period of Advent waiting that is not sitting idly by, but is active in showing love until that day comes when our Lord returns.

Such living focuses us on what God not only has done but continues to do through us. There is much more to our lives than fear. In those moments of what's next, keep in mind that regardless of what happens, we are never beyond God's abounding grace that will never pass away. AMEN.