

Advent 1- "Hope"
December 2-3, 2006
Luke 21:25-36
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Signs! We follow them all the time. What are some signs that you remember seeing just coming from home to church?

The signs that Jesus points to are the sun and the moon and the stars. These signs are recognized as signs of the Lord's judgment in other parts of the Bible. (Isaiah 13:9-10; Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 2:30-31) These signs are indication that the end is coming. What other signs do we see in the world today that the end is drawing near? (Human inhumanity to other human beings; violence and terror; diseases and strokes that claim young and old too soon; etc.)

These signs may cause people to give up and not care about themselves or others. People may give up on the church and on governments; these signs may cause people to want to numb the pain with alcohol and other substance abuse; the signs may also lead people to be consumed by worry, depression, or fear. Unchecked, people can be led to despair, even to giving up on God. But apart from God, there is no hope for us.

Carrie called it hopeless, as she remembered her 7th grade poem, "Hope is the hatrack on which I hang my dreams..." "I thought I was a poet that year, but obviously I wasn't and I never will be." There is a knock on her bedroom door. "Carrie, we're all waiting for you so that we can open Christmas presents." Her mother comes in. "Honestly, Carrie, can't you dress up a little for Christmas Eve? Or at least get the hair out of your eyes. Sometimes I think you are hopeless." She sighs loudly and leaves the rooms saying, "Hurry up!"

Carrie thinks, "Yes, Mom, I know I'm hopeless, like you always tell me. I guess I'll go downstairs, she thinks. But then she remembers that her boyfriend broke up with her last week. She also remembers her Chemistry teacher saying, "Carrie, I think it's hopeless. You'd have to get all A's on the rest of your quizzes and tests to bring your grade to a C." Carrie tossed the paper away saying, "I don't want to hear Mom say that I'm ruining my chances for college. In fact I will never have to hear that lecture again. I'll just write them a note. No one will care. I'm hopeless to them anyway. I'm most alive when I think of other people reading my thoughts and words."

"Come on, Carrie", she hears from downstairs. "I want to open my presents."

"Oh, all right. I'll do the note later." She goes downstairs and sinks into the couch while she watches the others tear into their presents, flinging paper everywhere. Then it's Carrie's turn. She opens a rectangular present from her mother; a sweater. She mumbles "Thanks". Some other little packages came from her brothers. "Oh, there's more." "Who's it from?" "Me" says Dave, her stepfather. She likes him. He treats her well and she respects him. She tears open the wrapping. It's a book, but there are no words on the pages. On the inside of the opening cover she finds the inscription, "To Carrie, Go for your dreams. I believe in you. Dave." He says, "Well, I know you want to be a writer, and I know you can do it."

Carrie is smiling. Someone believes in her and in her dreams, even when she has stopped believing in them herself. She grabs a pen and writes on the first page, "Hope is the hatrack on which I hang my dreams."

God does not give up on you and me. He says that when we see the signs that our world is so scary and broken, it is time to stand up and to raise our heads for our redemption is drawing near. God is sending and has already sent the sign for the whole world to see; Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sign that God sends us that God is working to redeem us and to heal the whole world. He sends Jesus to live with us and in us. Jesus is the sign that God is present with us and that God will fulfill God's plan for our healing and our salvation. The cross invites us to name the brokenness in our world and in our lives, and then to believe that God is at work in those dark and terrible times, to bring the healing that we need.

Jesus says that we need to be alert and to live our lives in prayer and thanksgiving to Jesus for what He has done and keeps on doing to heal our broken lives and our broken world. He is our hope when things are going wrong in our world and in our families.

We become signs to others, signs pointing to Christ, to hope, to encouragement and joy, not hopelessness and despair. We are called by God to reach out to fearful people, and we are called to gather together with others in our congregation, small groups, through Stephen Ministers and other caring people to strengthen and support one another in scary times.

The signs are there for us to stand up and rejoice for the Kingdom of God is drawing near. There is hope for us and for the whole world. God will carry through on His promise. The hope we have is Jesus Christ.; the One who is coming and has already come; our light in the midst of the darkness; our hope for now and for eternity. Hope in Christ! Amen.