

December 1, 2024 – First Sunday of Advent

“Not Business as Usual” by Pastor Julio Romero

GOSPEL: Luke 21:25-36

One of the best memories of my childhood was listening to the scary stories my oldest brother, who is 10 years older than I am, used to tell us. He was so good at making me and my other brother really scared that, at bedtime, we didn't want to turn off the light in our bedroom because we were worried about what scary things might be lurking in the dark. But once the new day came, it was business as usual. We were no longer afraid, and those scary stories were completely forgotten.

It's frightening what the Lord Jesus is telling us on this First Sunday of Advent, isn't it?

Disturbing signs in the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, distress among nations because of the roaring of the seas and waves. It reminds me of the great Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, which killed more than 230,000 people across 15 countries, and more recently, the solar eclipse that turned day into night over the entire Niagara Falls region this year. I wonder, who remembers those events—and many others—now? For us today, and for the rest of the world, all continues as if it's business as usual.

Were those events signs that pointed to the coming of the Lord? Or do we see them only as recurring natural events that frighten us? I believe every generation of Christians has seen or heard of similar events, similar signs, and asked the same question many of us ask today: Are they signs that the coming of the Lord is near? Should we take these events more seriously and connect them to the end of times?

Or should we wait for clearer signs?

Like Woody Allan the famous actor once said: “If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank”. God doesn't send signs like that. Mr. Woody Allen will have to continue waiting for them. But let me tell you, the signs of Jesus' return have always been here. They are everywhere and meant to keep us alert and awake, so that we don't fall asleep on the Lord Jesus.

If we look at history, the signs mentioned in this Gospel, which will precede the coming of the Lord, have been present in every generation. The other Gospels talk

about the rise of false prophets, earthquakes, wars, and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences (like the pandemic of two years ago). But we are not the only generation to experience or suffer such disasters. These signs have always been with us.

You and I know that the Lord Jesus will come again, and we also know that no one knows the time or hour. All we can do is wait, stay alert, and remain awake. That's what these signs are for—to remind not only our generation but also those before us and those after us to stay awake and be alert, knowing that the coming of the Lord is near.

I think that these prophecies from our Lord Jesus are not meant to instill fear in us, even though they sound scary. They are meant to help us stay focused and remain faithful. Why? Because the Lord keeps coming to us every day. He comes in those who are hungry, in the poor, in the sick, in the stranger, in the naked, and in those imprisoned in any way or form.

Yes, the Lord Jesus keeps coming, yet society often falls asleep to the presence of these people. We Christians should always be alert to their presence among us. Who doesn't want to see the Lord Jesus coming in a cloud with power and great glory? It would be quite a sight, wouldn't it? But so many look the other way or turn a blind eye to Jesus, who comes in the poor, the hungry, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and those without power or glory. This makes it easy for us to look the other way.

Jesus is nearer than we think. He keeps coming. Let's not miss Him today. Let's not wait until the day He comes in His glory and power to see Him, because He is among us now, in each of us, especially in those who need our presence and good hearts. Blessed are those who see Jesus now, and do not focus only on the day and time of His second coming.

Consider the story of William Miller:

In the 19th century, there was a wave of enthusiasm for prophecies predicting the actual date of the Second Coming of Christ. One such prophecy came from an Adventist leader named William Miller. After studying Daniel 8, Miller predicted that Christ would return on March 21, 1842, but then revised the date to April 3, 1843. Over 3,500 of his followers gathered in the Boston Advent Temple, only to be disappointed.

You might have thought the movement would have died, but it didn't. Instead, it continued to grow. Miller recalculated the date for the Second Coming and soon publicized a new date—April 18, 1844.

When the Messiah did not show up on that date, there was again frustration, and some followers left the Adventist ranks. Undeterred, Miller set a third date—October 22, 1844. Surprisingly, this third date rallied his followers.

They spread the news of the new date with an enthusiasm not seen before. Churches that did not accept this message were denounced as agents of “Babylon” and the devil. Despite opposition from established, mainline religious groups, thousands of people—including many clergy—began to prepare. One account notes that “fields were left unharvested, shops were closed, people quit their jobs, paid their debts, and freely gave away their possessions with no thought of repayment.”

Huge press runs of Advent publications like *The Midnight Cry* warned the public that “The Time Is Short,” “Prepare to Meet Thy God!” and “The Lord is Coming!” William Miller himself even began selling white “ascension robes” to the faithful, many of whom waited for the miraculous event in freshly dug graves. But, as we all know, the Second Coming did not occur.

A few weeks after the Great Disappointment, William Miller wrote, “Although surrounded by enemies and scoffers, my mind is perfectly calm, and my hope in the coming Christ is as sure as ever... I have fixed in my mind upon another time, and here I mean to stand until God gives me more light. And that is Today, Today, Today. Until He comes and I see Him, my soul yearns for Him.”

The reason we celebrate Advent is to prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus—not His coming in the manger in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, but His coming in the clouds with power and great glory. That is a sure thing; it will one day happen. So, we must stay awake and alert. But in the meantime, let’s not fall asleep to the Jesus who comes in our neighbors. Let’s not continue living as if it’s business as usual. **Amen.**