

This First Sunday of Advent begins a reading through Luke's gospel for a year, with a bit of John sprinkled in. But oddly, we start near the end, reading backward, if you will, to the start.

Has anyone read a book peaking first at the end? There are two books I can think of where I was so unsettled by how they ended that I penciled in an alternative end to comfort myself.

This Advent we jump from today's Luke 21 all the way to Luke 1, celebrating Mary's visit to Elizabeth whose babe leaps for joy. I love that story. We'll hear it December 19 – an important day at LCM. The Beverly Hills High School Choir is coming to sing carols before and during worship. After worship it's our Congregational Election and Budget Meeting.

We'll be asking if we, like Mary and Elizabeth will say Yes to God's call to let Christ be born among us in these unsettling times.

December 19! Please plan to be here, or on Zoom. Will we say Yes to God's call to be LCM this new year? I hope we will!

We wait for Advent 4 to read of Mary and Elizabeth, but today we hear of forebodings. There is some wisdom in starting near Luke's end because it helps us see early the costs.

God's power is different than the powers that seem to hold the world – then and now. Today's power systems aren't all that different from years ago in terms of the world's power verses God's power of love.

Luke's gospel announces the incredible: it matters to God when we choose to let God's power shape our lives! Love is the choice to enter in, live among, not hold back from the costs of being "with." Love just is costly! We learn this from Jesus with comes as God-with-us counting us worthy of the cost.

By first stepping into Luke's gospel with chapter 21, we learn Jesus chose to define neighbor as all, rather than just the near and dear; to see the enemy, the annoying and unstable as neighbor.

We learn Jesus chose to serve the poor rather than shame them, chose to lift the overlooked rather than overlook them. Jesus renewed the best of his heritage, living the command to love God and neighbor as self.

Jesus' choice to live God's love cost him the ability to grow old. He died young because of what he chose. Lucky for us, we're not called to be messiahs. But to be baptized, is to be called to radically embrace God's power of love.

If you wonder what God's love looks like – join us this year in reading Luke. We'll read a little each Sunday, starting today, and witness how God keeps choosing to come near, to be among, to get dirty hands and ruffled feathers for the sake of love.

Today we read of the sun, moon, stars, roaring seas, waves, trees, people faint from fear as the location of God's coming – the fragile created order. Into stark earthiness the Almighty chooses to dwell says today's Luke 21.

Listen with me again:

²⁵There will be signs in **the sun, the moon, the stars, and on earth** distress **among nations** confused by **the roaring of the sea and waves.** ²⁶**People, faint from fear** will be foreboding, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷Then they will see the One born **into humanity coming** with power and glory.

²⁹Then Jesus told a parable: “Look at the **fig tree and all the trees;** ³⁰as soon as they sprout **leaves** you know summer **is near.** ³¹So also, you know the reign of God **is near.** ³⁴“Be on guard so **your hearts** are not weighed down. ³⁶Be alert always, praying.

Luke names sun, moon, stars, earth, nations, seas, waves, people faint from fear, heavens shaken and God coming with glory that will be recognized in fig trees, in all trees when their leaves change. Don't be worried, we're told. Be alert with prayer!

This earth-focused text tells us the powers of the heavens find glory in being with creation. And what's more, Jesus doesn't complain about the fragility – but delights to be with and among, not running from the risks.

This Advent, may we consider what this kind of power means for our ministry. How can we glory in being with and among – even at risk for the sake of neighbors far and wide?

We ordered 3 dozen bottles of Olive Oil last this year to support at-risk Palestinians. We offered the community *Gardens to Go!* We prayed for one another through a *Prayer Chain*.

We partnered with the African Descent Lutheran Association for *God's Word, Our Hands*. We gave to Lutheran World Relief and gathered foods – as we'll begin doing again next Sunday.

As we prepare for our December 19th Election and Budget meeting, this is what it's about. We choose to sustain this ministry sacrificially and generously, because it supports us to be a community alive with God's power. Where but in faith communities is the purpose encounters with love that transforms us for the sake of the world?

You'll be receiving an Advent/Christmas Card from me this week – with original graphics by Leah. I wrote it with love, and hope when it arrives, you'll grab a cup of coffee, or your favorite drink and sit down to read both front and back prayerfully.

Circle things. Underline dates you want to remember. How might you respond to its invitation? How might God call you to engage our life together with your time, talent, and treasure – because church gives us Jesus, gives us the gospel, gives us one another as community, sends us with love.

Welcome to Advent's celebration of God showing up and empowering us to do the same!

Amen