

Jeremiah 33:14-16  
Psalm 25:1-10

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13  
Luke 21:25-36

Sometimes do you ever wonder what the future is going to be like? What will it be like for our children and our grandchildren and their children and grandchildren? So often it does not look very promising. It is natural to worry about the future. And yet, we need to be reminded that the future, thank God, is not in our hands, but God's hands.

Ragan Sutterfield, in an article in the last issue of Christian Century, declares there is an interesting juxtaposition that we are hearing these words of Jesus while leaders from more than 190 nations are making their way for the Paris Climate Conference that occurs tomorrow. The goal is to create the first legally binding international climate treaty. The hope is that we can do something about the climate. The climate is in crisis and the evidence is clear that it is our fault. 2014 was the warmest in recorded climate history, a record that 2015 is on track to break. It appears we have started an irreversible melt of Greenland and the West Antarctic. Huge chunks of ice are melting and calving off the glaciers. The melting ice is raising sea levels to the point that some low-lying nations are actively looking to move their people to higher ground. If we burn all of our fossil fuel, it will eventually raise the level of oceans 200 feet! The seas are 30 percent more acidic. Natural disasters are getting worse. We are seeing more droughts and more floods. What kind of a world are we leaving our children and grandchildren? According to Richard Leakey, Peter Ward et al., we are now living in the midst of the latest and worst of Earth's six extinctions --not the explosive impact of a meteor from outer space, but the slow-motion impact of a meteor called "Homo sapiens."

Jesus says, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees." The trees show is that the time is at hand. Several studies have shown that tree species are beginning to change their ranges in response to climate change. In 2012 the U.S. Department of Agriculture revised its plant hardiness zone map—figs can now be planted farther north than ever before. If we look to the trees we will see the signs of the creation unraveling in response to our way of life.

On top of that, what about distress among nations. The Cold War frightened us. We prepared ourselves for it with the duck and cover drills. Bomb shelters were all the rage. Home-economic classes taught girls how to furnish bomb shelters. I was not very old but I do remember the Cuban Missile Crisis, when we nearly entered World War III. We were all glad to see the Cold War come to an end, but now the Cold war has been replaced by the War on Terrorism. We have battling the terrorists since their attack of September 11, 2001. The terrorists are beheading their victims. It looks like the terrorists brought down that Russian plane, and over 40 were killed in Beirut the day before 128 people were killed in the Paris strikes. The master-mind of the Paris attack is still on the loose. Innocent people are being killed.

It continues to be a frightening world. We are confused by the roaring of the sea and the distress among nations. Luke here is not addressing when these things will take place. I am not declaring, "Look around at the signs, people! The end is near." Two men were at the side of the road, each holding a sign that read, "The end is near." A car came whizzing by, and the driver of the fast sports car yelled, "Go home, you religious nuts." As the car went past and squealed around the corner, the two men heard the car crash. The one man said to the other, "I wonder if instead of The End is Near, our signs

should have said, "Bridge Out Ahead!" Too often apocalyptic literature, like this passage, is interpreted to give us a time line and a map of when and where these things will take place. This passage, like other apocalyptic passages, is not meant to frighten us. So perhaps we need to hear these apocalyptic passage. The gospel writers won't let us get away with skipping ahead to the babe in the manger. Texts like this one force us to tune out the Christmas carols on the radio and look away from the glittering trees and giant candy canes in the stores, at least for an hour.

Passages like this do not eliminate the waiting and the worry. There are, and there will always be, events looming into the future that are beyond our control. But that uncertain future does not have to dominate the present. For beyond that uncertainty of uncontrollable future events is the sure and certain hope of a future secured by Christ. Advent reminds us that we are between the first coming of Christ as the Christ child, the babe of Bethlehem, and his second coming. Advent is from the Latin which means to come. We live in that in-between time. Oscar Cullman, a French theologian, used this analogy. Christians living between the resurrection and the second coming of Christ are like the Allied soldiers between D-Day and V-E Day. Once the Allied forces landed successfully on Normandy, their eventual victory was ensured even though there was still fighting and loss of life to endure. As one commentator noted, "What a difference to give your strength and even your life to a cause you know will prevail! So also with those Christians hearing this passage." One of the traditions of the church is the Advent wreath during the season of advent. Four candles, each for one of the 4 Sundays of Advent, and the Christ Candle in the middle. Traditionally the first Sunday of Advent is

that of Hope, the candle of hope. Even though our passage for today is rather foreboding, it is really a passage about hope. The hope that is in God's hands.

Yes, there is waiting and wonder and worry that colors our lives. But the threat of these things to overwhelm us are held at bay by Christ's promise to hold onto us, stay with us. That promise frees us, in the now, to consider those things we can do to influence the good, to serve those people we can here and now.

We will not save the world. We do not need to save the world for Jesus will do that in good time. We can, however, do our best to make the corner of the world in which we live a safer and more humane place because we labor in the confidence that Christ is coming and that his arrival will spell release, relief, and redemption for all God's people. For this reason, even in the most daunting of times and when the fear of unforeseen events assault us, we can "stand up and raise our heads" because we know "our redemption draws near."

We are living in the in-between times, the first coming of Christ as the babe of Bethlehem, the Christ child, and Christ's second coming. Jesus never said, God never promised, that they would eliminate worry. However, God is in control, the future is secured by Christ. We will not save the world. But we can do our best to make our corner of the world safer and a more humane place to live. On this first Sunday of Advent, we proclaim hope.

Blessed be the Lord. Amen.