

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Today is the second Sunday of Advent. And the world around us is already full of the noise and expectation of the holidays. Many of us have begun preparing for Thanksgiving travel, family gatherings, and the swirl of the holiday season. But in this place, Advent invites us to slow down, to breathe, and to tell the truth about the world in which we live.

One of the reasons we observe this longer and more ancient seven-week Advent is because the readings turn us toward Advent themes long before December. They invite us to acknowledge what is breaking, to name our longing, and to trust that God is present in every ending and beginning. And today's gospel meets us in that place.

The story opened with the disciples admiring the beauty of the temple—both its stones and its sense of permanence. And Jesus said, “Not one stone will be left upon another.” To the disciples, Jesus' words must have felt impossible. To the community that Luke wrote, the destruction of the temple had already happened. And in our own way, we know what it feels like when the foundations tremble.

We look around the world and see pieces falling apart. In places like Ukraine, where neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble. In Gaza and the West Bank, where families grieve unimaginable losses and wonder where safety can be found. In our country, where refugees and asylum seekers seek protection but find barriers, detention, and closed doors. We see it here in Chicago too. ICE raids leave communities terrified and unsure when officers might return. Clergy at Broadview Detention Center

were arrested on Friday for trying to offer Communion to those detained. Families are anxious as SNAP benefits are slowly resuming, after being paused just long enough to unsettle the delicate balance of feeding a household.

And then there are the quiet endings—the ones we don't always post on social media. A diagnosis or accident that changes the future you imagined. A job loss that leaves you facing uncertainty. A relationship that breaks. The weight of depression or anxiety. The feeling that something inside you is shifting, and you're not sure how to hold on.

You see, when life feels unstable, fear rises quickly. And fear makes us vulnerable. Fear makes us want certainty. Fear makes us want someone—anyone—to tell us what will happen next.

And that's why Jesus warned, "Do not be led astray." He knew how fear works on the human heart. Fear makes us cling to voices that sound confident. Fear convinces us that the loudest person must be the truest. Fear tempts us with leaders who promise simple fixes, or who blame easy scapegoats, or who offer security at the cost of compassion. Fear even shows up in the quiet ways we talk to ourselves—in the voices inside that whisper, "You are alone," and "Nothing will ever change."

I want to be clear: Jesus was not saying we shouldn't feel fear. Instead, he was saying that we shouldn't let fear drive the car. He's telling us not to hand our hearts over to someone who doesn't have our flourishing in mind. He's calling us back to who we are and whose we are, even when everything around us feels uncertain.

In response to Jesus' words the disciples asked, "When will this happen?" They wanted predictability. They wanted control. But Jesus didn't give them a timeline. Instead, he gave them a way to live. He said, "Do not be

terrified,”—not because there is nothing frightening, but because fear is not meant to rule us. He went on to say that “this will give you an opportunity to testify,”— he gave us a reminder that what we do in times of upheaval becomes witness. Our compassion becomes testimony. Our endurance becomes a sign of God’s presence. And I want to be very clear: Jesus is not saying that God will make the world crumble around you to test you or to teach you. Rather, when the world begins to crumble as it has always done in each generation, you have an opportunity to join in God’s work for liberation and justice in your response. This invitation is because, as Jesus added, “not a hair of your head will perish.” You see, Jesus is not saying that we’ll avoid hardship. But Jesus is saying that because of our baptismal identity— that is, our belovedness, our future, our life in God—we are secure. God is not absent in the ending. God is present. God is creating. God is beginning again with us.

Does that make sense? In short, fear is not meant to rule us, and turmoil is not caused by God as a test. Rather, in times of upheaval that will certainly come, we are invited by our baptismal identity to work for justice, liberation, and love as an expression of God working through us.

And this is the heart of Advent. Advent is not a countdown to Christmas. Advent is a season for people who feel the world trembling and still dare to hope. Advent doesn’t pretend the world is stable when it isn’t. Advent teaches us to sit among the rubble—with open eyes, awake hearts, and the trust that God is working even here.

And into that waiting, the prophet Malachi spoke: “The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.” Healing will come. Justice will come. A dawn will come. And God is with us long before the sun rises.

Now, as we near the end of our year-long journey through Luke's gospel, we remember how Jesus began his ministry in Luke 4— he proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight, and freedom for the oppressed. It's important that we remember that this is what God's work looks like. This is what new creation looks like. This is what it means to testify when the world shakes. For, we are invited to live as Jesus lived.

And that brings us to this year's Advent theme: Standing in Solidarity. For when the world trembles, we draw closer to those most impacted. Our Advent Project gives us concrete ways to do this. In solidarity with Latino/a congregations walking with vulnerable families. In solidarity with RefugeeOne, helping newcomers rebuild life with dignity. In solidarity with Opportunity Palestine, supporting children and families living through instability and trauma. These aren't abstract ministries. These are our neighbors. These are communities God loves. And our solidarity with them is not charity; it is the gospel. It is Luke 4 taking on flesh among us.

So too, after worship today, our Third Sunday Teaching continues this work as we re-examine the so-called "clobber passages" and reframe the way scripture has caused queer people harm. That too is solidarity. And that too is testimony.

Friends, this passage is troubling, but it is also comforting. For, today we hold multiple truths together: yes, the world is trembling. Yes, fear is real. But God is nearer than the devastation. Christ shows us love and liberation. The Spirit helps us endure. And already, the sun of righteousness is rising among us with healing in its wings. Amen.