

2024 12 01 – *Starry Nights: The North Star*

Scripture: **Luke 21:25-36** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

It is the Passover Festival and Jesus is with his disciples travelling along a dusty road from the temple in Jerusalem back to Bethany where they are staying with friends for the night. Jesus has just told his followers that they are about to come upon hard times, apocalyptic times, times of change. Some of you may remember that we explored the meaning of apocalypse a couple of weeks ago. Today's reading follows directly from that apocalyptic prophesy.

Jesus and his disciples were Jewish people living under the oppressive rule of the Roman emperor, his kings, and his army. Most of Jesus' followers were peasants. They were people who made their living from farming, fishing or trades. As Jesus travelled from town to town he met people who were struggling to survive under this oppressive regime. Some had even lost their land to their debtors. It was a time of struggle and unrest and even though Jesus preached peace and justice and lived a revolutionary life of non-violence, his prophecy would suggest that he believed destruction and war were inevitable.

Some of us may be having similar feelings about the world that we are living in today. We may even be avoiding world news in order to remain as calm and centred as possible during these chaotic times. It can be overwhelming to hear of all the pain that people are suffering and to listen to the predictions of what might be coming. For some of us that suffering is personal. We are

experiencing pain even within ourselves or our families through illness, loss, division or violence.

Jesus is talking to his disciples in the days leading up to his death on the cross. So he is also preparing them for a time when he will not be with them. He says,

Signs will appear in the sun, the moon, and the stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish, distraught at the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the earth. The powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Jesus is telling his disciples that they need to be looking for signs. And the first place they are to look is the heavens, the sky, in particular, the night sky.

This year our Advent Study Group is following a resource called *Starry Nights*. Through this study we are being invited to do some stargazing, to spend time just looking at the wonder and the beauty of those tiny points of light that shine in the night sky. We are being invited to spend time thinking about the wonder of God's creation, its enormity, its steadfastness, its ancient history.

<https://www.saltproject.org/advent-store>

Last Tuesday at our Advent Study we talked about the North Star: how sailors used it for navigation long before GPS was available, and how slaves followed its light to freedom. It was, of course, a star that guided the Magi to the Christ

Child. And the Internet tells us that stars have even been used for thousands of years to guide the planting of crops.

For instance, the ancient Egyptians relied on the rising of Sirius, also known as the "Dog Star," as an important indicator of the annual flooding of the Nile River. This celestial event marked the beginning of the agricultural season, as it brought nutrient-rich sediment to the riverbanks, ensuring a bountiful harvest.

<https://starregister.org/the-importance-of-stars-in-ancient-cultures.php>

For many, the stars have been a guide to help them on their way home, on their path to liberty, to success, to safety.

Jesus was telling his disciples that no matter what happens, there is hope, the hope of a starry night, the hope of new life. The same kind of hope that tells that even though the trees are now bare and the ground is now covered in snow, that spring will come, that there will be buds, and leaves and fruit.

Jesus was assuring his disciples that these changes in the sky and in the trees are signs "that the reign of God is near." Even in the midst of the apocalypse, in the midst of winter, in the midst of grief and suffering, there is hope, hope for a coming time of peace and justice, hope for new life for all.

One of the questions we asked ourselves at our Advent Study was, "What are some of the signs of hope in our own lives?" I wish now that I'd written down all

their answers. But here are a few that I remember: “the birth of my latest great-grandchild,” “the children leading worship last Sunday,” “the afternoon sun shining on the hoar frost creating stars of light,” “the many musical concerts that take place during Advent.” These are signs of hope because they are also signs of new life, signs of God’s creative power, signs that appear even in the midst of the darkest night

One of the other things that we learned this week was a bit of star trivia that was truly astonishing to me. Our study guide noted that “due to the Earth’s slow wobble, different stars have been the “North Star” throughout history. And in about 12,000 years, a different star will take its place.” How many of you already knew that? It’s both astonishing to me and a sign of hope. How you ask? Well here’s my thought: It’s a reminder that even when it feels like the “North Star” in our lives has been taken away, even when we are wobbling and our sense of security, guidance and hope have disappeared, there will be another star to take its place. We will find our way through the night.

Jesus wanted his disciples to see these signs of hope and to know that peace and love and justice are never far away. He wanted them to be ready so they would see the signs and know when the risen Christ was near, however the Sacred might appear: in the clouds, as a small child, as a homeless person on the street, as a prisoner or a refugee.

Jesus also wanted them to know that they were never going to be alone. He said, “the heavens and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

This is our most important truth: that we are not and never will be alone. The Holy Mystery, the Ground of our Being, the Essence of Love is both infinite and eternal. So I am going to end with Steve Garnaas-Holmes' words of assurance and hope, he calls this poem "Not pass away."

You will pass away.
This generation and the next will disappear.
This nation will go down into the dust.
Governments will shrivel like dried leaves
and blow away into the earth.

We may delay or hasten our end,
but it will come.
Soon or later, the whole human family
will be no more.
All our good and evil will pass away.

But the love of God does not die or change.
Grace will outlast our failings.
The blessed oneness of all living beings
will pulse with light
long after all beings have passed.

Whatever losses we fear,
whatever disasters threaten us,
they will pass.
Whatever the children of the Beloved suffer,
their belovedness will not fade or tremble.

Even as we fear the heating of our globe
and the ripping of our society,
the Goodness at the heart of all things
remains, forever and ever.
Cling to this, not what passes,
and you will know life that is eternal.
www.unfoldinglight.net

May our starry nights be a hopeful reminder that we are not alone.

May it be so. Amen.