



CHURCH of  
the SAVIOUR

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## **“Homesick”**

**November 28, 2021**

Luke 21:25-36  
Rev. Andy Call, Lead Pastor

When I was in junior high school, I really wanted to be a good basketball player. *I wanted to*, but I wasn't. Between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I had a chance to attend a basketball camp, the premier camp in that part of the state. I was sure that if I could apply myself that week, I could improve enough to be a contributing member of the team.

On the day the camp began, because of my family's schedule and my eagerness to get started, we arrived early for check-in, maybe even before they were ready. As I picked up my name badge, the counselors pointed out the main features of the camp – the dining hall, the indoor and outdoor courts, the showers, and the bunk house. I grabbed my things and entered the door on the lower level, checked out the rooms, and selected a bunk. Since it was so early – literally no one was there yet – I unpacked and took a nap. When I woke up, it was still quiet. I looked around a little bit. One other guy was down the hall, but he was a high schooler. I figured it was either a small group that week or that people were just coming late. So I waited.

Eventually, it was time for dinner, and still no other campers. A bit confused, I made my way to the dining hall, which by now was filled with hungry, noisy campers. Where did they come from? It turned out that the main entrance to the bunk house was upstairs *on the other side of the building*. By the time I figured this out, all the bunks had been chosen. It would be just me downstairs – and that other guy I never saw. For the rest of the week, I was an outsider – a full participant in organized events, but during free time and at night, I was alone. This was not the experience I thought it would be. On day three, I received a care package from home – snacks, a book, little reminders from home, and a note from Mom and Dad. I set aside the chips and candy bars and just held that note and cried. I had never been more homesick.

I expect there isn't a person in this room or any other who hasn't experienced homesickness. Maybe you remember your first sleepover away from home, or going off to college, or moving to a new community. Perhaps this week especially, being homesick is how you felt leaving your family or having your family leave you after a holiday spent together.

*Homesick* is a word that first appeared in 1756, a German compound word *Heimweh* – literally “home pain.” It was originally used by Swiss travelers to express their longing for the mountains. It's an apt description for what we're going through now.

We've been experiencing collective homesickness for nearly two years. Before we had a vaccine, we were simply sick of being at home! But we've all experienced homesickness during this pandemic – to do the things we love to do, to be with people we love to be with, longing for a return to normal before we forget what “normal” is.

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus describes a terrifying scene:

There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world.

What kind of a reading is that for the First Sunday of Advent? We just finished Thanksgiving, for crying out loud. We're queueing up the Christmas carols and decking the hall. Then we come to church and find Jesus talking about planets shaking and flood waters rising, of people fainting from deathly fear? What the heck?

But Jesus's depiction of disaster is eerily all-too familiar to us. Global sea levels are at the highest on record, and rising now at a rate more than double of what they did over the last century.<sup>1</sup> According to the World Meteorological Organization, the number of weather-related disasters has increased by a factor of five over the last 50 years, driven

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-sea-level>

largely by climate change.<sup>2</sup> Earlier this week, NASA conducted the Double Asteroid Redirection Test, or DART, to determine if intentionally crashing a spacecraft into an asteroid would effectively change its course in the event it was on impact trajectory with the earth.<sup>3</sup> And, in the midst of a global pandemic that has taken the lives of over 5 million people, depression runs rampant among the populace, tripling in the first months of the pandemic. 20 months later, the rate of depression is even higher, affecting nearly 1 in every 3 U.S. adults, according to a Boston University Study.<sup>4</sup> And we haven't even mentioned things like racial inequity, the opioid crisis, political division, social media pressures, or the omicron variant.

I'm not suggesting that Jesus was predicting the turmoil we're experiencing in 2021 or that his description is a warning that the end is near. What I *do* want us to notice is what follows the grim scenario he depicted:

*Then they will see the Human One coming on a cloud with power and great splendor.*

Jesus uses here the term Human One (more commonly translated Son of Man) to refer to himself, a title found in *Daniel* and other apocalyptic literature. As Rev. Moseng shared with us earlier, while apocalyptic literature seems disorienting and fearsome to us today, in its original context it was actually a sign of hope to persecuted and oppressed people. Here, just when things look hopeless, Jesus appears, coming from above with power and majesty. He goes on to say, "Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near." His words weren't intended to frighten, but to encourage.

Presbyterian educator and author Elder Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri recalls the anxiety she felt for loved ones in Puerto Rico following the devastation of hurricane Maria in 2017. She describes her eagerness to hear from family and friends during the aftermath of the storm as *el silencio de la espera* – the silence of the wait. That's a powerful image, isn't it? Sometimes, silence can be deafening. And we know a little something about waiting. Whether it's a lesson we wanted to learn or not, we've all become familiar with *the silence of the wait*.

As we approach Christmas, we think of Christ's first coming, God entering our world in Jesus. Jesus came, the child of a teenage mother and her new husband as they traveled to his ancestral home. When they arrived, there was no welcome, no place for them. Even in Joseph's "home," they were outsiders, forced to shelter in the open. As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, let's remember Luke's story as he told it, not turn it into a warm, fuzzy, idealized version.

In our collective longing, it is important to remember that *home* is not always a safe or comforting place for everyone. For some, home is not a place of nostalgia to which one returns, but a place one had to survive to emerge into a better life. For some, being stuck at home is more than an inconvenience – in situations of poverty, hunger, unsafe living conditions, untreated mental illness, or abuse, home is a place of danger and pain. All the more reason for us to imagine the home that Jesus and the prophets imagined, a home where all are gathered together in peace and safety and wholeness. Such a hope can seem so very far away. Our inclination may be to look away, to distract ourselves from reality, to self-medicate and numb ourselves to the pain. Jesus urges us not to give up hope, but to imagine it, to hold on to it, to stay alert for it – even when things seem at their worst – because he is not far from us.

That's why it is so important for us to be connected to one another. Alone, it's easier for us to give up, to give in, to lose our faith and our hope in the midst of our struggles. But together, we encourage each other, remind one another of Christ's love, and embody his loving presence for one another along the way. *Home* as Jesus imagined it wasn't only a future hope, but a practice of hope here and now. Christ has *already* come and he dwells within us and among us, giving us the strength to practice hope together. Latinx theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz invites us to see the coming presence of Christ not only as the *kingdom* of God, but as the "kin-dom of God," which she defines as an "interconnected community, seeing God's movement emerge from *la familia*, the family God makes."<sup>5</sup>

God entered the world when God's people were subjugated by a foreign power, when religious leaders colluded with the empire, when poverty and hunger were pervasive, a world where hope was scarce. God came into the world in Jesus – hope and salvation in the form of a fragile, helpless baby. In him, God's purpose was accomplished, when we

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<sup>2</sup> <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/weather-related-disasters-increase-over-past-50-years-causing-more-damage-fewer>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nasa.gov/image-feature/stay-tuned-for-dart>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/depression-rates-tripled-when-pandemic-first-hit/>

<sup>5</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz quoted in "The Kin-dom of Christ" by Melissa Florer-Bixler. *Sojourners*. Nov. 20, 2018. [sojo.net/articles/kin-dom-christ](https://sojo.net/articles/kin-dom-christ).

least expected it or even wanted it. Do we have the faith to believe that Christ can bring hope and healing to a world plagued with COVID-19, political and racial division, and environmental precarity?

I survived that week of basketball camp, though I never became the standout player I wanted to be. That wasn't the camp's fault – playing basketball just isn't among my gifts. The day after I got that care package from home, I resolved to just ride it out, waiting patiently for the camp to end. Charlie Huggins, the founder and namesake of the camp, must have noticed that I was struggling. Though he didn't personally instruct the junior high boys, he came up to me while I was practicing free throws on a court by myself. For several minutes, he worked with me to adjust my footwork, how I held the ball, and my elbow placement, improving my form and my accuracy. But then he invited me to sit down with him for a few minutes and talk. He asked me about my school, my team, my friends. He asked about where I lived and what I liked about my neighborhood. He helped me remember home not as a place I was separated from, but a place I carried with me wherever I was. That evening, I joined in with the rest of the guys to watch a replay of a classic college basketball game – not entirely part of the “in” group, but not separated from them, either. From across the room, Coach Huggins caught my eye and gave me a little wink. I wasn't alone anymore.

In our waiting, we may feel far from home – a physical home, an emotional home, a spiritual home. But in the silence of the wait, remember that we are *never* alone. God is near. Christ is within us, restoring our hope, working in us and through us to bring about the kin-dom of God. In him, we find our true home. Thanks be to God. Amen.