



LESSONS

**JEREMIAH 33:14-16**

**PSALM 25:1-10 (1)**

**1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13**

**ST. LUKE 21:25-36**

BIBLE IN 90 DAYS TEXT

**ST. JOHN 20:19-31**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

**STIR UP YOUR POWER,**

**LORD CHRIST, AND**

**COME. BY YOUR**

**MERCIFUL PROTECTION**

**ALERT US TO THE**

**THREATENING DANGERS**

**OF OUR SINS, AND**

**REDEEM US FOR YOUR LIFE**

**OF JUSTICE, FOR YOU LIVE**

**AND REIGN WITH THE**

**FATHER AND THE HOLY**

**SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW**

**AND FOREVER. AMEN.**

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**Liturgical Day: The First Sunday of Advent**

**Date: November 29, 2009**

**Sermon Title: These are Written, so You May Come to Believe**

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, here we are. I have preached eleven straight weeks of sermons from the Old Testament: a personal record for me. Two nights ago the Risendals saw Carmelo contribute 50 points to the Nuggets' victory over the New York Nicks. So he set a personal record this week, too. The difference between us is that there is a reasonable chance that Carmelo might break his record again. I can guarantee you that Pastor Dave will not have a stretch of 11 sermons from the Old Testament again. But it hasn't been a bad run, and I've learned a lot along the way. I hope you have too.

At any rate: I'm glad to announce that this morning's sermon is based on the Holy Gospel according to St. John, the twentieth chapter! I feel as though I've just come home from a long journey. And in some respects, we have. On the one hand, it has been a long journey, for our "Bible in 90 Days" readers, from Genesis through the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of John – a 77 day-long journey, to be precise (yesterday was day #77 – we finished the Gospels, and read the first six chapters of the Book of Acts). On the other hand, we have arrived home, in a significant sense. The closing words of this morning's Gospel lesson show us where "home" is, when it comes to Bible reading.

I've been asked any number of times why we took on this project. And our participants have been asked to share how it has made a difference for them. We've heard a variety of answers, including:

- It has heightened my anticipation, whenever I turn to the Bible.
- It has caused me to ask even more questions about my faith.
- It has taught me patience and understanding.
- It has allowed me to spend more time thinking about God.
- It has taught me about God's high expectations of me.
- It has left me better equipped to think about my God and my faith.
- I don't fall asleep when reading the Bible anymore.
- I now have a broader perspective about the stories in the Bible.
- I have been touched by the connections between the Old and New Testaments.

As a Pastor, it is pretty exciting to hear those comments coming from members of your church. I was hopeful that this project would help us to become more engaged with the Bible. Those are just the kinds of responses I was hoping we might hear. And I was excited to be in the midst of a community where 25% of our adult members would invest themselves in an effort of this magnitude. So these comments are music to my ears, and I am so grateful for the growth that has taken place.

But there is a hope that goes even beyond what these words express. And it is spelled out in the closing words from this morning's Gospel lesson.



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

We're almost at the end of the story. Jesus has been raised on Easter Sunday. He appears to Mary in the Garden. He appears to the disciples two times; once without Thomas, and once with him. All that is left is for Jesus to meet the disciples at the seashore, and rehabilitate Peter with a three-fold command to care for the followers of Jesus. So it is at this point, that John writes:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.<sup>i</sup>

Here St. John tells us his purpose for writing the Gospel account in the first place. His primary concern is twofold: he wants his readers to realize that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God for whom God's people had been waiting throughout the centuries; and he wants, through believing, for those readers to experience what it means to live life in his name. Faith is at the heart of the Gospel according to John – and faith is at the heart of this entire Bible. God wants us to be reading on a regular basis. Maybe not through the Bible every 90 days. (Let's see, that would mean we'd have to read the Bible cover-to-cover four times every year. I'm pretty sure God doesn't expect us to read quite that much...) But God wants us to be reading the Bible on a regular basis, because through our reading the Holy Spirit takes hold of our hearts, our faith is strengthened, our experience of forgiveness and renewal is intensified, and we find ourselves living with a deeper awareness of the presence of God in our lives. That's the main reason I wanted to promote this program here at Saint Peter. I had hoped that through this kind of thoughtful attention to God's word, we might grow stronger in faith, and experience more directly the kind of life that Jesus wants us to have.

That was the purpose of reading "The Bible in 90 Days," that was the purpose John had in mind when he wrote his Gospel, and that is the purpose of this coming season: the one the church calls Advent. Advent encompasses the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day. Between now and the arrival of Christmas Eve, the church has traditionally participated in a threefold pattern of waiting and watching. It has been more than 800 years since St. Bernard of Clairvoux taught that Advent waiting takes three forms: past, present and future. We remember ancient Israel, who in the centuries before Christ's birth, waited with great longing for him to arrive. We look for Christ to come into our lives in the present – our present – as Jesus fills our lives with his grace and presence. And we look for that future day, when Christ will come a final time to bring the history of this world to its conclusion. Between now and Christmas Eve, we will be considering each of these three aspects of Advent waiting, but this morning we are reminded of the present coming of Christ. Through our Bible reading, through our worship, through our prayers and devotion, through our times of service... Christ comes to us today, and fills our hearts in a way that allows us to live life in his name. A careful attention to Scripture, and a devoted participation in the season of Advent, can help us to see when that happens, and be touched by it.

I mentioned a bit ago that we attended the Nuggets game two evenings ago. We were there for "Chess Knight with the Denver Nuggets." Our son Landon is in a chess club at his school, and the Chess Master who leads the class invited his students and their families to join him for a chess lesson up in the club level before the game started. As we listened to Landon's Chess Master describe a famous chess match to us, I remembered a description I read in a magazine about a town square out east, where locals often gather to play chess. On any given weekend afternoon, there might be five or six games going at once – with two

<sup>i</sup> St. John 20:30-31, *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

people playing each game, and as many as a dozen others watching. The onlookers scrutinize every move – shuddering with regret at a bad move, and experiencing the chills when a winning strategy becomes apparent. Every now and again a player will make a move that, even if the opponent doesn't realize it, signals the end of the game. Invariably, one of the onlookers will whisper: "there it is." This spectator has seen the truth: that game has ended. It may take a dozen more moves for it to become apparent to all, or it may happen within a move or two. But that game has ended. Someone has had a glimpse of what is really taking place.

"There it is." Perhaps that is what John wants us to experience as we read his Gospel account. Perhaps that is what the church wants for us during this season of Advent. At the heart of our faith is the opportunity to see those glimpses of the One who has given it all to us – the One who fulfilled the longings of ancient Israel – the One who comes into our lives and gives us the gift of new life today – the One who promises to return to us at the end of this world's time. Many in this world may not yet see it yet. Some of them will never see it. But for those who look through the eyes of faith, it is there. The One who has blessed us so richly, is with us in this moment, and has promised to return again.

May we live with that awareness. May our time with the Scriptures give Christ an Advent into our lives. May this Advent help us to experience him in new and powerful ways, as he fills our hearts with faith and hope and joy.

A blessed Advent season to you all. I look forward to preparing, with you, for our celebration of Christmas this year. Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 29, 2009)

### **Gospel Lesson; English Text:** <sup>ii</sup>

<sup>21:25</sup> "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup> People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup> Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." <sup>29</sup> Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; <sup>30</sup> as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. <sup>31</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. <sup>32</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. <sup>33</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. <sup>34</sup> "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, <sup>35</sup> like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." <sup>iii</sup>

### **Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:**

<sup>21:25</sup> Καὶ σονται σημεῖα ἐν ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ ἀστροῖς, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς συνοχὴ ἐθνῶν ἐν ἀπορίᾳ χροῦς θαλάσσης καὶ σάλου, <sup>26</sup> ἀποψυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ φόβου καὶ προσδοκίας τῶν ἐπερχομένων τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, αἱ γὰρ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν σαλευθήσονται. <sup>27</sup> καὶ τότε ψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλῃ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς. <sup>28</sup> ἀρχομένων δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι ἀνακύψατε καὶ ἐπάρατε τὰς κεφαλὰς ὑμῶν, διότι ἐγγίζει ἡ ἀπολύτρωσις ὑμῶν.

<sup>ii</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> St. Luke 21:25-36, *New Revised Standard Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>29</sup> Καὶ εἶπεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς· ἴδετε τὴν συκὴν καὶ πάντα τὰ δένδρα· <sup>30</sup> ὅταν προβάλλωσιν δη, βλέποντες ἄφ' ἑαυτῶν γινώσκετε τι δη ἐγγὺς τὸ θέρος ἐστίν· <sup>31</sup> οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅταν δητε ταῦτα γινόμενα, γινώσκετε τι ἐγγὺς ἐστίν ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. <sup>32</sup> ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν τι οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἢ γενεὰ αἰτη ὡς ν πάντα γένηται. <sup>33</sup> ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ παρελεύσονται, οἱ δὲ λόγοι μου οὐ μὴ παρελεύσονται. <sup>34</sup> Προσέχετε δὲ ἑαυτοῖς μήποτε βαρηθῶσιν ὑμῶν αἱ καρδία ἐν κραιπάλῃ καὶ μέθῃ καὶ μερίμναις βιωτικαῖς καὶ ἐπιστῇ ἐφ' ὑμᾶς αἰφνίδιος ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνη <sup>35</sup> ὡς παγίς· ἐπεισελεύσεται γὰρ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ πρόσωπον πάσης τῆς γῆς. <sup>36</sup> ἀγρυπνεῖτε δὲ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ δεόμενοι να κατισχύσητε ἐκφυγεῖν ταῦτα πάντα τὰ μέλλοντα γίνεσθαι καὶ σταθῆναι μπροσθεν τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. <sup>iv</sup>

### “The Bible in 90 Days” Lesson:

<sup>20:19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. <sup>v</sup>

#### Scheduled Readings for “The Bible in 90 Days” (9/13/2009 - 12/12/2009)

Date	Begin Reading At	Sermon Based On
9/13	Genesis 1:1	Genesis 1:1-19
9/20	Leviticus 1:1	Exodus 16:2-15
9/27	Deuteronomy 23:12	Deuteronomy 6:1-9
10/4	1 Samuel 28:20	Joshua 24:1-3, 14-18
10/11	1 Chronicles 1:1	1 Kings 3:5-12
10/18	Nehemiah 13:15	Nehemiah 1:4-11a
10/25	Psalms 89:14	Job 38:1-11
11/1	Isaiah 14:1	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b
11/8	Jeremiah 33:23	Isaiah 25:6-9
11/15	Daniel 9:1	Ezekiel 2:1-5
11/22	Matthew 26:57	Micah 6:1-8
11/29	Acts 6:8	John 20:19-31
12/6	Hebrews 1:1	Romans 5:1-11

<sup>iv</sup> St. Luke 21:25-36, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

<sup>v</sup> St. John 20:19-31, New Revised Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).