

**Sermon for November 29, 2015 (Advent 1, Year C)**  
**Offered by Nathan Ferrell at The Episcopal Church of Saint Mary**

Texts: Jeremiah 33:14-22; Psalm 25:1-9; Luke 21:25-36

Title: Heaven and Earth Will Pass Away

My dear friends: Welcome, once again, to the season of Advent.

On this day, we begin a new year in the Church, as we go back to prepare for the first coming of the Messiah, while also preparing for the second coming of the Lord.

This season of Advent is all about preparing for change, because when God comes, EVERYTHING changes.

The name of Advent comes from the Latin word, ADVENTUS, which, if translated, means something like coming, arrival, onset, appearance.

In the Anglican churches of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Advent was seen as a very somber time of reflection upon “the last things” in life.

In those days, the four Sundays of Advent did NOT have such pleasant themes of joy, hope, peace and love. Those are modern innovations.

Back in those days, the themes for the 4 Sundays of Advent were death, judgment, heaven and hell !

And these 4 were the Advent sermon topics back in those days!

Oh, how things have changed...

In Luke’s Gospel, we hear that the Lord Jesus stood among his friends and told them, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Luke 21:33).

We begin the new year right at this point, because Advent is all about change.

In the same way that January 1 in the secular calendar is a time to consider necessary changes in one’s life, so we begin a new Church Year with the Advent call to change as we prepare for the coming of the Lord.

The primary question facing all of us as we start this season of Advent is this:

**Are we ready for the change that is coming?**

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is speaking about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which we know took place in the year 70 AD.

This is apocalyptic speech, something which was quite common in that place and time.

In this talk, he is warning his friends and preparing them to face the change that is coming.

Everything that makes up their world as they know it, and everything on which they have been pinning their hopes, will be taken away and destroyed.

"Heaven and earth will pass away" – everything that you think is real and solid and stable – all of this will pass away!

BUT... and here is the good news part. "But my words will not pass away".

It is impossible to over-emphasize how incredibly traumatic the loss of the Temple was for the Hebrew people.

These words from Jesus that speak of the destruction of Jerusalem are somewhat akin to someone telling you today that the days are soon coming when the Constitution of the United States will be torn up and thrown away, and the US Capitol will be knocked down and demolished by any invading army!

How would we make sense of this? How would life go on in the face of such radical changes?

It is never easy when one's world falls apart, but even in the face of such confusion, the Lord calls his people to stand firm in hope.

Everything on this earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. And the kingdom of God is near. Place your trust in that.

This is the same type of promise made by the prophet Jeremiah, writing to the Hebrews while in exile in Babylon.

“Thus says the LORD: If any of you could break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night would not come at their appointed time, only then could my covenant with my servant David be broken” (Jeremiah 33:20-21).

Day and night come and go. So do the nations who happen to be the world power at the moment. Babylon. Persia. Greece. Rome.

All of them come and go as the Lord wills.

But God’s covenant promise WILL NOT be broken.

My friends: let this promise of the Lord be your hope in your everyday life as you confront and deal with life-altering changes each and every day.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a man named Peter of Blois wrote some insightful words about the Advents of Christ, and the presence of Christ. He wrote this:

“There are three comings of our Lord: the first in the flesh; the second in the soul; and the third at the judgment...The first coming was humble and hidden; the second [in the soul] is mysterious and full of love; the third will be majestic and terrible...In the first [coming] a Lamb; in his last, a Lion; in the coming between the two, the most tender of friends.”

Between the Lamb and the Lion, we are given now the friendship of the Lord for comfort and strength.

Last night, I had the chance to visit with Mary Lygo, one of our Saint Marians who was well-known and loved when she sang in the Choir.

I visited with Mary at Mercy Hospital, because unfortunately Mary is dying.

Oh, probably not today or tomorrow, but soon. God alone knows precisely when.

Mary and I have had previous conversations about the fear of death, about how to overcome the haunting feeling, as one faces the impending reality of death, that you have not done all that you should have done.

Now, however, I am thankful to say, Mary tells me that God has filled her with a real and deep sense of peace. The kind friendship of God is preparing her for her end.

Each one of us will face such a moment. Sooner or later, our organs will cease to function and our hearts will cease to beat. When that day comes, the ONLY thing left for each of us to hold on to will be God, and God alone.

I know that there are some of you who will struggle with the changes coming to the Prayer Book. We are dipping our toe into the waters of change now during Advent, in the hopes that larger changes coming down the road will thereby feel less traumatic.

The 1928 Prayer Book served the Church for about 40 years before the process was started to develop a new one.

It's been almost 40 years now since the 1979 Prayer Book was authorized, and so at General Convention in July the process was begun to develop a new one.

God alone knows when this process will end.

But I can assure you this: NO ONE will be entirely happy with the product of this process.

That is how decision-making happens within a large and diverse community. It produces a compromise. And that is not necessarily a bad thing.

At the end of the day, what we know with certainty is this:

Heaven and earth will pass away. Everything will change. In our nation. In our Church. In our bodies. The reality of change affects all of life at every level.

The question is this: **Are we ready for the change that is coming?**

We CAN be ready - tomorrow and every single day, if we keep our trust in God alone. That's how, when everything is falling apart around us, we can "stand up and raise [our] heads, because [our] redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Alleluia. Amen.