

“A Fresh Perspective”

Luke 21:25-36

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December 1, 2024

From the Pulpit

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Let us pray: O Holy One, come to us now and touch our spirits through Your Word for us this day. And, O Dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. Amen.

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Happy New Year, Happy New Year!

No, of course, it's not January 1, but on this *first Sunday* of Advent, it is “*liturgically correct*” to greet one another by saying “Happy New Year!”

It's hard to believe but, here we are, *already* on this **first Sunday** of this **first season** in this **NEW YEAR** of our liturgical calendar!

As you may already know, the word, **ADVENT**, comes from the Latin term, **ad-VEN- toos**, which literally means *COMING or ARRIVAL*.

And, furthermore, this word, **ADVENTUS**, is derived from the Biblical Greek term, **PAROUSIA**, which refers to the **SECOND COMING of CHRIST**.

So, ALL of that to say, that in *our* Christian tradition, ADVENT is understood as a *time of anticipation and preparation* as we await *both* the birth of the Christ Child *and* the Second Coming of Christ.

Now, *today's* lectionary reading is found toward *the end* of the *last* chapter in the Gospel of Luke (in the 21st chapter).

And our text for this morning is part of the longer apocalyptic discourse in which we hear directly from Jesus who warns the people, then, of coming

persecutions *and also* foretells the eventual destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.

And so, our Gospel reading for this morning – this familiar Advent story – **is BOTH *apocalyptic* AND** this same passage is also regarded as a **spiritual teaching** when Jesus says:

Be alert at all times and pray that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.

Wow! *THERE IS A LOT GOING ON IN OUR TEXT FOR TODAY!*

In *these* 12 verses from Luke, we find BOTH **prophetic words** *AND instruction* to live our lives in the way of Jesus!

And so, in *this* way, our text for this morning offers us what is known as a “BOTH-AND” spiritual truth! Our reading from Luke today is *both* prophetic *and* it is also instructional.

One of my favorite writers and thinkers is the Quaker educator and social justice activist and renowned author, Parker J. Palmer, who wrote the book, *The Promise of Paradox: A Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* which was first published back in 1980.

Now, in this book, Palmer describes the spiritual practice of adopting what is often referred to as “*both-and*” thinking.

For many of us, it is typical and often habitual to view the world around us through an “*either or*” lens or what is known as “binary thinking.”

Now, this “either-or” fallacy occurs when we are presented with *only* two ways of responding to a situation or understanding and relating to the world around us.

And the **two options** or choices, at first, seem to be mutually exclusive.

For example, it is so easy to *only* see one other as:

- either a Republican OR a Democrat (that’s certainly one of the primary ways that we tend to label one another these days, isn’t it?);
- or in the workplace, you may be considered either a “professional” OR a “laborer;”
- and you may have grown up hearing the phrase, “you’re either with us – OR against us;” (and truthfully, it’s *not* always *that easy* to find the middle ground);
- AND one of the MOST significant examples of binary labeling is that you are EITHER a dog person **OR** a cat person!
(Now, I do know that many of you are, indeed, BOTH!)
- and, lastly, here, in this region of the country, you are either a Buckeye OR or for that team up north!

And speaking of ... what a heartbreaker of a game yesterday, wasn’t it?! So close !

In his book, Parker Palmer writes:

“The way in which we respond to contradiction is pivotal to our spiritual lives.”
(x2)

He goes on to say: **paradox** requires a “**both/and**” understanding rather than “either/or” thinking.

Paradox is defined as: “a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd **but**, in reality, paradox expresses a possible truth.”

Holding space and making room for paradox can be very difficult – especially during these divided times across our nation today. As you all well know, our country is polarized in many different ways, and often reflects that “either/or” logic: “If you’re not with us, then, you must be against us!”

Now, I certainly acknowledge and admit how easy it is to fall into this trap of **binary thinking** because, after all, we are human – and we all have our “hot button” issues – and automatic responses!

However, throughout the years, I have come to understand through spiritual direction and reflection and prayer – and **especially** through my own personal experience of conflict – that it *IS possible* to find another way or a **third way** of relating to one another – especially with those with whom we have significant political and ideological differences.

By acknowledging the gift of paradox in our lives, we are able to discover a broader perspective which recognizes and accepts that two seemingly contradictory truths can co-exist. **And furthermore, there is rarely one. single. right. answer.**

The basis of this spiritual practice which is often referred to as “*both-and* thinking” is that multiple things can be true at the same time *and* that everyone has a right to their own personal experience regardless of the experience of others.

Fr. Richard Rohr, a Christian mystic and best-selling author, has written extensively about “**both-and** thinking” and the gift of paradox.

He teaches that each one of us *must* learn to live with paradox or we will not be able to live peacefully or happily – even a single day of our lives! In fact, Fr. Rohr insists we must learn to *love* paradox or we will never be wise or forgiving or possessing the patience needed in healthy relationships.

In recent years, I have learned that **even** in the corporate world, many business leaders (including my spouse!) are finding that this BOTH/AND principle offers a powerful insight into the mindset of effective leadership – one that moves beyond false dichotomies and embraces the complexity of *real-life* and *real-world* decision-making.

I'd like to close this morning with one of the best-known examples of paradox in Scripture which, of course, are the Beatitudes.

May these words of blessing inspire you and encourage you and uphold you in the coming week:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for **theirs** is the kin-dom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for **they** will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for **they** will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for **they** will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful, for **they** will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for **they** will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for **they** will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for **theirs** is the kingdom of heaven.*

Thanks to be to God! Amen!

