

Grace and Peace from God our Father and Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

If we could only know what tomorrow will bring, the future will be – how would our behavior and our lives change?

I suspect there might be *a few quick trips to a stock broker*, to the *casino* or to the *convenience stores to buy lottery tickets*. Beyond these tactics to exploit or prosper from our fore-knowledge, if we knew how everything was going to turn out, ***I suspect that each one of us would face life with a great deal more certainty, more decisiveness, and would be plagued by far less anxiety and doubt.***

Most of us are actually pretty *capable of dealing with the present*. We have developed skills, tricks and techniques for dealing with the sorts of complication, obstacles and encumbrances that snare us from day to day. Unfortunately, most of us are *somewhat less facile at dealing with the huge scope of time that surrounds the present moment*.

Many of us might think that we are quite able to deal with the past, because after all what is there to do about it? And ***yet our mistakes, burdens and regrets about the past can cripple us***, enslaving us in patterns of behavior that keep us ***trapped in that mistake, with that burden and in that regret, for weeks, months, years or even a lifetime***. For most people coming to terms with and making peace with our past is the work of a lifetime.

Most of us feel somewhat less confident about ***the future since we simply have no idea what exactly we may be facing and when***. I would say, that most people, no matter how well off they may be deal with

anxiety and uncertainty because we can never know what is going to happen to us or our loved ones beyond this very moment. How many of you have had the experience of *waiting for someone to return home* – usually at night – and find your mind racing to all kinds of conclusions about the whereabouts and condition of your child, spouse, etc. It happens.

The *21st chapter of St. Luke's gospel deals with this sense of uncertainty we all face in this life*. While *it may seem that St. Luke's gospel is concerned here about the end times*, a comparison to St. Mark's gospel reveals *a marked shift from emphasis on the coming of the end times to living in between times with hope and peace*. One of the things that is different is the change away from the destruction of Jerusalem being woven into the end times events. Luke's Jesus steers everyone away from speculation about the last days, *instead focusing their attention on the immanence, the nearness of the Kingdom of God, even as they wait*. Jesus' words in *Luke 21 direct us to have hope in the midst of any coming tribulation, for God's Kingdom is near and promises to bring his people through the time of tribulation*.

LET ME GIVE YOU A *personal EXAMPLE*. Ten years ago, after my son, Erik, had died, I received a great many words of consolation and encouragement. Most of them didn't really give me much hope to see beyond the pain I felt at the loss of my son Erik. *Most people's words just hung around me, and didn't seem to matter. They wished me well, hoped I'd feel better, promised to pray for healing and comfort. But in the midst of that terrible loss, well-wishing friends or acquaintances could not help me see a way forward*, to believe that

there would be a time when the pain and emptiness that consumed Sara and I would come to an end.

But there was one. I remember one parishioner whose words gave me hope. He was ***a man in his 70s***, and after worship he knocked on my open office door. He was a person I liked and admired, and he stood there with his eyes welling up with tears. He said, *“I wanted to tell you how sorry I am that you have to go through this pain. My wife and I lost a son 42 years ago, and I remember what an empty, hollow time it was.”*

“Did you ever feel like yourself again?” I asked.

“The pain goes away in time, but what you’ve lost is never far from you. It helped me get to know God better, and I’ve learned never to take joy or people I love for granted. God will get you through.”

*I looked back at my friend and saw his strength, compassion and willingness to enter into that pain again for another, and **I felt hope for the first time.*** He had survived and become a good man, a compassionate man, a strong man; it was possible. ***I didn’t know how, but I knew that somehow I would come out the other end of this grief, and God would be with us while we trudged through the pain.***

This is exactly ***the kind of encouragement that Luke’s gospel intends to provide.*** Life is uncertain and often painful. Loss and trouble cling to us like sand burrs hitching a ride. The world itself seems self-destructive in its constant violence and turbulence. ***Nonetheless, even as all of that is going on around us, the kingdom***

of God is very near; it is at hand.

This is what the Season of Advent is about. *Waiting with the gift of faith and with hope even as the troubles of the world swirl all around us.*

The truth is that the very one who speaks these words of encouragement to us this morning willingly entered into our pain for us, took upon himself the burden of all our past mistakes and sins, suffered the punishment for our lack of trust and obedience to God, and entered into death so that even in that desolation we might not need to be alone.

Even facing the most daunting future – a cruel, unjust death itself – Jesus demonstrates that love can persevere, and that risen from the dead, he is as near to us as our very breathe.

AMEN !!!