

120124 Sermon "Emmanuel—God with Us" Luke 21:29-36

The holiday season is often filled with busyness—shopping, decorating, traveling, and preparing for celebrations, which are perfectly fine. But amid all the hustle and bustle, it's easy to miss the true meaning of Christmas.

This reminds me of a humorous story about a woman who traveled abroad without her husband got to Paris and found a fabulous bracelet she'd been looking for. (This is a story from the days when people used to send telegrams before the telephone.) So she sent a wire back home saying, "I have found this beautiful bracelet, one I've been looking for all my life. It only costs \$7,500. Do you think I can buy it?"

Her husband wired back a short but firm reply, "No, price too high!" And he signed his name. But in the transmission, the comma was left out and the message read, "No price too high." Oh, she was thrilled! Omitting that comma almost put that guy in a coma.

In a similar way, the distractions and busyness of life can cause us to miss the real point of Christmas. The true "price" of Christmas isn't the gifts we buy or the events we plan—it's the immeasurable gift God gave us in sending God's only Son, Jesus Christ. Advent calls us to pause, take a deep breath, reflect, and recognize the priceless treasure of God's love revealed in Emmanuel, "God with us."

As we light the first candle of Advent, we remember that this season calls us to a posture of watchfulness and hope. Advent is a time to reflect on God's promises, fulfilled in Christ's first coming and assured in His second coming. In Luke 21:29-36, Jesus calls His followers to stay alert, to recognize the

signs of God's kingdom, and to trust that salvation is near, even in uncertain times.

This message of hope is woven throughout the Bible, reminding us that God often works through the rejected and unexpected to bring about God's purposes. A vivid example of this is the story of David and King Saul—a story of rejection, perseverance, and God's ultimate redemption.

Three thousand years ago, David defeated Goliath and saved Israel from the Philistines. But instead of being honored, David became the target of King Saul's jealousy. Saul, who saw himself as the builder of Israel, rejected David as an obstacle to his vision of the kingdom.

Saul constantly pursued David, organizing 3,000 men to hunt him down. By human standards, David's death seemed inevitable. Yet, despite Saul's power and efforts, David was chosen by God to lead Israel. When Saul died in battle, David ascended to the throne—not by his own might but by God's will.

In Psalm 118:22-23, David reflects on his journey, singing, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." Saul had rejected David as unworthy, but God made him the cornerstone of Israel's future.

This story mirrors the ultimate rejection and redemption found in Jesus Christ. Like David, Jesus was rejected—by the religious leaders, by His people, and even by His disciples at His arrest. Yet He became the cornerstone of salvation, the foundation of God's eternal kingdom.

In Luke 21, Jesus uses the parable of the fig tree to teach His followers to recognize the signs of God's work. Just as budding leaves signal the change of seasons, so do the challenges and upheavals of life signal that God's promises are unfolding.

David's journey was filled with such signs—moments when God's hand was evident, even in rejection and hardship. In the same way, Jesus reminds us to see beyond the chaos of the present and trust that God is at work, bringing redemption.

Jesus' warning in Luke 21:34-36 is clear: "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life." David's life is an example of staying spiritually awake. Though he lived as a fugitive for about 13 years after Saul turned against him and wanted to kill him, he trusted in God's plan and resisted the temptation to take matters into his own hands—even sparing Saul's life when he had the chance to kill him. David's faith and patience reflected a heart attuned to God's will.

Advent calls us to live in the same way: not distracted by the world's worries or consumed by its pleasures, but focused on God's promises. Being spiritually awake means trusting that, like David, we are part of a greater story that God is writing. Jesus assures us, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Luke 21:33). This is the hope of Advent: God's Word endures. His promises are unshakable.

David's life and Psalm 118 remind us that rejection and hardship are not the end of the story. God turns rejection into redemption, transforming what the world dismisses into the foundation of His kingdom. Jesus, the ultimate cornerstone, assures us that our redemption is drawing near. Just as David

trusted God through rejection and hardship, we too are called to lift up our heads in hope. Advent is a season of waiting, but it is not passive waiting. It is a time to prepare our hearts, to trust God's promises, and to live with the anticipation that Emmanuel is near.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, a hymn "Emmanuel, Emmanuel" (#204 in the UMH) that we are going to sing after the Holy Communion reminds us of the God who is with us in every season:

*"Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His name is called Emmanuel,
God with us, revealed in us, His name is called Emmanuel."*

Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.