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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
12/2/2012, Advent 1C  
Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36  
The Cares of This Life

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In this sermon, I chiefly want to discuss what our Lord calls the “cares of this life.” Not only do they weigh life down now and make it hard, but they also have this disadvantage: they can distract us from heaven and hinder us in getting ready to meet our Lord Jesus. My theme, then, is this: Let even careworn people try to keep their hope alive. My text comes from our Gospel Lesson, from Luke 21:

<sup>34</sup>But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and *cares of this life*, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; (Luke 21:34, RSV)

We do not live in the Garden of Eden. Our age is called “this fallen age,” when we are beset by sin, death, and the devil, and when we are (as the Confession liturgy puts it) “in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.” It is a mixed kind of age, with both heroism and shameful conduct, joy and sadness, faith and impiety. It might be nothing much to brag about, but it is *our* age. It is our native land. We were born into this age, Jesus was born into this age, and so were the saints. It is an age brimming with adventure, as each of us decides what sort of persons we are going to be. It is an age with potential for both good and bad, love and meanness, prosperity and poverty. It is the age we are familiar with.

But there is another age ahead of us. This one is fun to think about. It is called “the Kingdom of God.” It is ahead of us. Let me describe it using one of the most cherished descriptions in the Bible:

<sup>6</sup>The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid<sup>1</sup>... <sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze [think of that: here’s a cow and here’s a bear, and they are grazing side by side], their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.... <sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will

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<sup>1</sup> a young goat.

be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9, NRSV)

Let me lift up one more of our beloved descriptions of the Kingdom of God. This one speaks of the end of all sorrow. It comes from the book of Revelation, but is based on ancient promises found in Isaiah:

<sup>4</sup>And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Revelation 21:4, KJV)

History is not a random collection of events, but a good and divine trajectory toward the Kingdom of God.

## **FROM HERE TO THERE**

The problem is that to get from here to there, from this fallen age to yonder, the Kingdom of God, we need to pass through a crisis called “the Day of the Lord.” This is the Day I want us *to be ready* for. That’s my subject. That’s what’s on my heart: I want us to be ready for the coming Day of the Lord.

The Old Testament speaks of the Day of the Lord with a mixture of both longing and trepidation. Who could not long for the Day of the Lord? It means that the Kingdom of God is very near. It is just that Israel had enough integrity to wonder whether she was going to make it *through* the Day of the Lord over into that good land, the Kingdom of God.

Israel’s prophets warned her not to be overly casual about the Day of the Lord. For example, Amos says this:

<sup>18</sup>Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. <sup>19</sup>As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. (Amos 5:18-19, KJV)

It’s like, you can’t win! You escape a lion only to run into a bear. You escape the bear and dash into your house, with your heart beating a mile a minute, only to be bit by a snake. And Amos was quite serious about this. He especially wanted the wicked to know that the coming Day of the Lord was going to be a tough time for them, so they had best mend their ways while they had time.

Then, in this morning’s Gospel Lesson, Jesus retains this sense that the coming Day of the Lord is nothing to be taken lightly. Even the days of prelude

to the Day of the Lord are troubling, with signs in sun and moon and stars, with the roaring of the sea and waves, and men fainting with fear and foreboding:

<sup>25</sup>And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, <sup>26</sup>men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; (Luke 21:25, RSV)

Jesus is coming again, in power and beauty and glory. But Jesus joins Amos and the other prophets of old in cautioning us to try to get ready for his return:

<sup>42</sup>Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (Matthew 24:42, KJV)

So, the Day of the Lord and the Second Coming of Jesus are a coming crisis for humanity. To get from here to there, from this fallen age to the good Kingdom of God, we must first deal with the Day of the Lord.

## **TAKE HEED**

In this morning's Gospel Lesson Jesus teaches us that there will be signs of the approach of that day. Just as a fig tree puts out leaves, and thereby signals that summer is approaching, so there will be signs in heaven and on earth that the Day of the Lord and the Second Coming are at hand.

But even if we do not catch the signs, there is something we should indeed heed: We should heed the state of our own souls, lest that great day come, and we be found unprepared.

<sup>34</sup>But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare; <sup>35</sup>for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man. (Luke 21:34-36)

In this passage, Jesus points to three things that can leave us unprepared: "dissipation," "drunkenness," and "the cares of this life." I note that the first two are different from the third one. The first two represent a kind of escape from

life. “Dissipation” is “dissolute indulgence in sensual pleasure; intemperance.”<sup>2</sup> It is what the Prodigal Son did when he journeyed into a far country, and squandered his resources:

<sup>13</sup>And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. (Luke 15:13, KJV)

In such dissipation, he turned his back on the ordinary ways and responsibilities of life.

Likewise with drunkenness: It is a temporary saying farewell to ordinary consciousness.

But the “cares of this life” go in the other direction. Such a one is not escaping life, but immersing himself or herself overmuch in life, and thereby failing to take thought of heaven, the day of the Lord, the return of Christ, and the Final Judgment.

## CAREWORN

You and I: we are people with responsibilities in life. It is natural that we should become immersed in our work, focused on our duties, and heavy-laden with burdens. We *care* about things! That is why we become burdened with the “cares of life.” But it is part and parcel of the Christian life to balance daily life and its cares with eternal life and the principles of heaven.

Bring to mind some examples from the Bible. Take King David, for example. He is a King, which means that he bears many responsibilities in life. He lives not only for himself, but for the kingdom and all the people entrusted to him. His kingdom is beset by enemies, including the Philistines, and he himself is beset by a passionate temperament that at one point in life led him into terrible sin and terrible regret afterwards. He has been persecuted by powerful enemies, including King Saul, whom he faithfully served, and by his own son, Absalom. If ever a man had reason to be careworn, David is such a man. Yet he writes and sings the Psalms. His heart never gives up, never becomes ungrateful, but rather shines with a spiritual joy that can lead him sing

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. (Psalm 103, KJV)

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/dissipation>

Or think of the apostles Paul and Silas, beaten with many stripes and cast into prison with their feet held fast in the stocks. How does that blessed line go—the one about them singing?

<sup>23</sup>And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: <sup>24</sup>Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. <sup>25</sup>And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. (Acts 16:23-24, KJV)

And think of the early Christians to whom St. Peter writes. They suffer persecution, yet they maintain joy in Christ:

<sup>7</sup>That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: <sup>8</sup>Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with *joy unspeakable and full of glory*: (1 Peter 1:7-8, KJV)

Remember too the father in the story of the Prodigal Son. How many Christians through the centuries have had wayward children as did this man! Yet the straying of the Prodigal Son did not embitter the old man. He maintained his hope. He kept his eyes on the horizon, and when he at spied his son again, off he dashed, gathering his robes around his knees so that they do not hinder him and his joy at rushing toward his son.

And you and I might have been blessed to know people in our own lives whose hope and whose joy remain unconquerable. They have cares in life, yes, but they do not become careworn. Let me repeat, then, a story I told a few weeks back in the Thanksgiving Eve sermon.

Church Sexton Chris Schulze told me of this recent scene with his mother, Margaret. Margaret has been in our prayers recently as she has been struggling with an intense bout of leukemia. Praise God, she has been making good progress recently. But with Margaret, it is as if, progress or no, she means to praise the Lord.

And so the lovely story goes like this: It was two a.m. in the hospital. It was the wee hours, and the nurses were gathering with smiles on their faces around the door to Margaret's room. Inside the room, Margaret had wanted to sing. So, she and Chris took up our hymnal—the old LBW like we have in our pew racks

here at Immanuel—and began singing their way through the “Praise and Adoration” section of the hymnal. You’ve probably noticed that our hymns are grouped around themes. If you look at the top of each hymn, you will see the name of the group in which the hymn seems to fit most perfectly. The “Praise and Adoration” section of our hymnal that includes “Beautiful Savior” (LBW 518) and “How Great Thou Art” (LBW 532) and “Now Thanks We All Our God” (LBW 533), and “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” (LBW 551), and “When Morning Gilds the Skies” (LBW 545):

When morning gilds the skies,  
My heart awaking cries,  
May Jesus Christ be praised!

You know Chris Schulze has a good singing voice. So does Margaret. I can well imagine the nurses quietly gathering around for the beauty of the singing. But even more for the beauty of the faith!

Even those with singing voices of a poorer sort can nonetheless cast our cares aside, and join the angels and the saints in praising the Lord.

You bear many cares in this world. Poverty, unemployment, aging, illness, loneliness, a broken heart, wayward children, or loved ones struggling with illness: such responsibilities can leave us careworn and short on patience and grace.

Yet, Jesus would have us practice patience and grace nonetheless. This is the season of Advent. It is the season that especially invites us to keep our hope alive.

## **NOT COVETOUSNESS, BUT CARES**

Much of the most beautiful and eloquent preaching in the Bible and in the long history of the church is directed against covetousness, greed, mammon, and the laying up of treasure on earth. It is easy enough to agree that we should not be greedy people.

But our Lord’s warning this morning is about something that in many ways is good: It is good to take seriously the “cares of this life.” It is hard to imagine someone who is so carefree that he is not from time to time preoccupied with the cares of this life. We have duties and responsibilities to our families and friends and colleagues. It is right that we should give them some attention.

Yes, give them due consideration, but, Jesus says, do not let them so invade your life that you have no thought left for heaven or for him. Do not let the cares of life so impoverish you that you forget Jesus, for he never, ever forgets us, and we are on our path to meet him. Who knows how soon? But we are on

our path to meet him, and he asks us now, before we even get there, that take thought of him, both for our encouragement and for goodness of life.

## REDEMPTION

I close with a hopeful note about the Second Coming of Jesus. In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus teaches us that for all its darkness and threat, the Day of his return should not be regretted. His great words go this way:

<sup>28</sup>And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your *redemption* draweth nigh. (Luke 21:28, KJV)

“Redemption.” That is a friendly word. “Thy redemption draweth nigh.” And we should not be surprised at this. Redemption draweth nigh because *Jesus* draweth nigh. It is all worth it, then, our attempts to walk and live in his ways. Our work to repent and mend our ways shall not be wasted labor. Any attempt at renewal of our spiritual lives will not be work done in vain. Indeed, it shall carry its own rewards in this present life, for a clean conscience and the respect of others is worth much in this world, and will constitute some good to carry forward in the life to coming, even into life everlasting with Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.