

God's Gates
Matthew 24:30-35
November 28, 2021

Today is the first Sunday of Advent where we wait and anticipate the birth of Jesus. However, the lectionary scripture readings for today are about the Second Coming of Christ. I've always wondered about that. What a strange way to kick off the Christmas season: this juxtaposition of the infant Jesus with the one who comes in power and glory. Warnings of distress and anxiousness alongside "good news of great joy for all people." Let's take a look at this.

In our scripture passage, Jesus is talking about the signs of the end of the age: false prophets, earthquakes, famine, increase of wars, persecution, increase of wickedness. We now pick up our scripture passage: Matthew 24:30-35. Jesus is speaking:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

³² "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁴ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³⁵ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

At the end of the age, Jesus is standing at the very gates. I am intrigued by this use of gates. I assume those are the gates of heaven. Perhaps they look like the picture on your bulletin.

Think about gates for a moment. What is their purpose? They mark property. For all who see the gate, someone lives here.

Gates are used to keep people or animals out. Here in Green Valley, it is to keep the javelinas from getting into our gardens. I used to have a bird feeder inside the gate of my front yard. One night, I didn't close the gate properly, and at about 10 p.m. I heard a racket coming from my front yard. I looked out the window and there were 6 huge javelinas destroying my bird feeder.

I grabbed some pots and pans, opened by door and made as much noise as I could with the pots and my voice. All ran away except for one, who stood at the gate, turned towards me and began to snort, kind of like a bull. We stared at each other, wondering who was going to give in first. The javelina did. He turned and walked away, and I secured my gate.

Gates can be used to memorialize. Recently, CNN had a 6 week special on Princess Diana. When she tragically died, people placed thousands upon thousands of flowers at the Gates of Kensington Place.

Being from Minnesota, I am a Prince fan. Prince was a singer and musician, who had a large residence called Paisley Park in Chanhassen, MN. The residence was surrounded by a chain-link fence and a large gate. I visited Paisley Park several months after he died. ***People used his gate and fence to post items to remember him by: photos, paintings, ribbons, flowers, poems.

But most importantly, gates are a place of entrance and exit. "The Beautiful Gate" of Herod's temple in Jesus' day was made of brass and required twenty men to close it. These gates were opened during the day to allow the citizens to come and go in the temple, the place where God resided.

Apparently, there are gates in heaven. Maybe they are there to mark off property to keep the spiritual line between heaven and earthly things. Some people talk about "Thin places" where the line or gate between heaven and earth is thin, perhaps where the gate of heaven is open.

In the Book of Revelation, a door or gate opens to allow the Apostle John to see a worship service in heaven (Rev 4: 1)

Maybe gates in heaven are there to let people in and out. Jesus did say he was the gate for the sheep (John 10:7).

Perhaps more importantly these gates of heaven represent God's story – there is a beginning, a middle and an end to this story. God has a vision for the world, and the gates of heaven are flung open in God' story.

One of my favorite book series is a children's set of seven books called "The Chronicles of Narnia" by C.S. Lewis. The sixth book of Lewis's series, "The Silver Chair," begins with a heartbreaking scene of two children being bullied by school classmates. They have heard rumors of a mighty lion named Aslan and decide to seek his help. They try to ***figure out how to contact Aslan. Is there something special that they have to do? Some secret that they have to earn? One child suggests they should draw mysterious figures in the ground and chant magic spells.

One of the children concludes, "But really, we can only ask Aslan."

When the other child eventually comes face to face with the great lion, Aslan clarifies, "You would not have called to me unless I had been calling to you." In other words, Aslan, who represents God, says he came to the children first before they even knew about him.

The gates of heaven tell the story of God coming to us first. God with us. Emmanuel.

In the beginning of this story: There was the gate that was flung open over 2000 years ago. God walked through and came for a visit in a very surprising way. The Word made flesh. Some people call it "The Great Intrusion." God broke through in the form of a small child to show us what God is like. This is hope...reflected in our candle of hope.

In the middle of God's story: God flings open the gates and visits today.

When Jesus was trying to prepare his disciples for his departure, he said I am going to leave you my spirit which allows me to be with you always. This is hope...reflected in our candle of hope.

At the end of God's story: God will fling open the gates once more and Christ will come again. The story will end well, and everything will be as good in the end as it was in the beginning of creation. This is hope...reflected in our candle of hope.

So, what do we do with all these gates, the one that was flung open 2000 years ago; the gate that is flung open today; the one that will be flung open at the end of the age? What do we do with all this heavenly coming and going?

Sometimes we get caught up in the messes of the world. When something happens half way around the world, we know it instantly. Everything is coming at us all the time, and we are not emotionally equipped to handle all the wrong in the world. The weight of it brings discouragement, depression, despair. However, we have the gates of heaven.

It means that God hasn't left us alone. God didn't just create us and then sit apart watching from a distance. God has been involved every step of the way, so much so that God opened the gate to visit us in Jesus; God kept the gate open as God's spirit resides with us today. It means God stands by the gate of heaven for the right moment to come back and set up the new heaven and earth. This is hope....as reflected in our candle.

So do not be anxious. Slow down and commune with Christ. Pay attention to the entries and exits you do each day. Pause to know that Christ is near the gates through which we pass. As we enter our gates, we are coming into the Presence of God. As we exit our gates, we are walking out through the gate with Jesus into the world.

Proverbs 8:34 says, "Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors." Pay attention to your gates. When I come home each day, I enter into the gate that becomes my place of rest and rejuvenation. When I leave my house, I exit my gate into the world to serve you and others as pastor.

What are the gates in your life?

We read about the Second Coming of Christ today because the gospel story isn't complete until you sing all three verses:

The past: God has already come and pitched his tent

The present: God's presence is here

The future: God will return to set the world right.

As we read in the Book of Revelation:

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,
“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev. 1:8)

Our Faith in Jesus Christ is a historic fact,; it is a present-day reality, and it is a future hope. We celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas; we affirm the presence of the living Christ in the form of the Holy Spirit today, and we believe that Christ will come at the end of time to reign over all creation. Because Jesus’ words never pass away. This is our hope, and we live it and share it with all we encounter.

So let us enter God’s gates with thanksgiving in our hearts. Amen.

Linda is going to lead us in a song that I learned at church camp. Maybe you did, too. It’s called “I will Enter His Gates.”