

**Advent Posture - Alert & Assured**

*“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” Luke 21:28.*

Our postures can send all kinds of messages. Students are masters of posture, often telling their teachers what they think of their lectures without uttering a word. Children just by their posture can tell their parents and the whole world whether or not they are happy with what is going on. Even adults try to read and analyze the slightest changes in posture to see how comfortable others are around them. Throughout our lives, we can also become very self-aware of our own postures perhaps to try and hide how we truly feel or maybe to make sure we're sending the clearest message we possibly can.

One time that I became super aware of my own posture was with a rollercoaster. Senior year of high school, we had an end of the year trip to Cedar Point, the amusement park in Sandusky, Ohio. While this was supposed to be an exciting last hurrah for the senior class, I was rather apprehensive about the whole trip because I've never been a huge fan of rollercoasters. I don't if it's the heights, or the worry about getting sick or something else but for some reason rollercoasters made me anxious and afraid.

The closer our buses got to the park the more tense I felt. While I wished I could have hidden my discomfort, my posture began to betray me. As the rest of my classmates were bouncing around with joy and excitement, my body was even more rigid than normal. Thankfully, I had good friends who took me under their wings to try and show me how to relax and enjoy these fun rides. We started out small to build some confidence, but then it was time to move on to the rides that excited them most.

I'll never forget walking up to the "Millennium Force." From the front of the park, this ride was noticeable, but for me the distance made the ride seem less intimidating. Once we were there standing in line though, my body felt like it was already on an internal rollercoaster long before we sat down in the actual car for the ride. When our turn came, there was no smile on my face and any laughter was severely forced. Numerous times, I felt my body telling me to not go through with it, but eventually we were locked in and heading up the first hill so I was truly along for the ride whether I liked or not.

I remember slowly rolling over that first hill like time was standing still for a moment and then reality hit quickly as we plummeted three hundred feet straight down until bottoming out to go up the next hill. After making it past that first hill, my posture changed almost instantaneously. I went from a posture that silently screamed that I was anxious and afraid to actually screaming out loud in relief, alert of what I had been through and assured that I could make it through the rest of this ride and maybe a few others too.

Now while this new church season of Advent certainly isn't some sort of intimidating amusement park ride, it would do us good to consider our Advent posture and the message this posture shares as we enter into this new season. Advent is a season of preparation, a season of repentance, a season of expectation and a season of joy. In this season, we remember and give thanks that God came and took on flesh so that He might save our flesh. We also give thanks that God continues to come to us to deliver the forgiveness of sins and salvation that He won directly to us through His Word and Sacraments. We look forward to His promised return waiting with great expectation.

This season of Advent is a time when we once again can become aware of the message that our posture sends about Jesus' coming and His promised return. For sometimes, without knowing it our Christian posture says way more than we realize. Perhaps all the talk of Christ's second coming moves us into a posture of being anxious and afraid. Maybe the gift of Christ coming to us in Word and Sacrament has grown monotonous and dull leading us to a posture of boredom and false security. Or possibly in the build up to Christmas Day, the worries and cares of the holiday season might send us into a posture of distraction and indifference.

As the sinful people we just confessed ourselves to be at the beginning of this service, an honest look at these postures means that we can find ourselves somewhere on this spectrum this Advent season

from anxious and afraid to bored and falsely secure to distracted and indifferent or somewhere in between. These types of postures and the messages they proclaim aren't the type of posture and message Jesus shares with us in our Gospel reading. Rather the posture Jesus proclaims to us today is an Advent posture of being alert and assured.

In verses twenty-five through twenty-eight, Jesus speaks to the times when our Christian posture screams that we're anxious and afraid of His promised return. Jesus lists some general signs of the end that sound pretty foreboding as is but as these signs grow closer and closer in proximity to us it's hard not to be greatly intimidated! However, what Jesus assures us of, is that these intense signs aren't merely scare tactics of an awful end, but are truly pointing us to the completion of our redemption! Even the posture Jesus describes, straightening up and raising the head, proclaims a message of being alert and assured that for the believer in Jesus Christ, who died and rose for them, His return is for their redemption not their destruction.

Then in verses twenty-nine through thirty-three, Jesus shares where these signs should lead us. As we continue to see signs of the end in our own generation, they aren't to lead us to a posture of boredom and false security. Each sign is a reminder that the fullness of God's kingdom is near and that all the more as that Day approaches we need to be connected where God's kingdom has already come through Jesus' death and resurrection, delivered in Word and Sacrament. Everything else around us will pass away, but His Word of life and reconciliation spoken and connected to physical elements of water, bread and wine isn't going to pass away. His eternal Word keeps us in an Advent posture of being alert and assured.

Finally, in verses thirty-four through thirty-six, Jesus deals with the posture of distraction and indifference brought on by the worries and cares of this world. In the face of the distractions and indifference this world can bring, the Lord's gift of prayer continues to grant us an Advent posture of being alert and assured. Through prayer we are given the strength to be alert to the temptations that surround us and the peaceful assurance of a faithful God who listens and hears us, who has protected His people before and will continue to protect us now and cause us to stand, by His grace, unharmed, before His throne someday.

Alert and assured, that is the message of the Advent posture our Lord and Savior Jesus not only wants for you, but brings to you through His Word, through His birth, life, death and resurrection, through Baptism and Holy Communion. This Advent season, as we remember Christ's birth, give thanks for His continued presence even now and await His promised return, we do so alert and assured of what is to come. Yes, these end times are and will continue to be intense but we have God's eternal Word upon which we confidently wait trusting that when the end finally does come it will be for our redemption.

This holiday and Advent season may or may not feel like a rollercoaster depending on what each of us has packed into this time. But with Christ's promised return just around the corner and growing closer and closer day by day, we can feel just as intimated as I did as I got closer to the "Millennium Force." If and when those moments come for you this Advent season, know that we have a Savior whose Words and works keep us alert and assured no matter how intense things become. As we wait this Advent season for Christ's coming, may the Lord lift our heads and make us stand before Him in His grace. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan