

# Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

## Sun, Dec 1, 2019 – Advent 1 with Holy Communion - Hope

### Strange Expectations

(Ps 122 and Luke 21:25-36)



**Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud  
with power and great glory.  
Now when these things begin to take place,  
stand up and raise your heads,  
because your redemption is drawing near.**

#### Insights from the story within the story

I've been having trouble with this sermon, with this particular part of our ongoing conversations about the kind of flourishing discipleship we are nourishing here at Brentwood – and that's what a sermon is – part of an ongoing conversation – it's a big reason why we ponder ideas together before I get to do a 'ted talk' each week – remember our series a few years ago on a Saturday morning when we invited people to join us as 'theologians exploring discipleship' – that what our 'ted' was all about – it's an ongoing conversation in which everyone's experience in the Spirit, everyone's growing into the maturity of our relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit is heard, honoured, and provoked to even greater maturity – there are no experts who dictate what must be believed or done – only fellow learners being nourished by each other to flourish in our faith – so let me share, briefly, a couple of my struggles with this text as it relates to our theme on this first Sunday of Advent, Hope

#### Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- We're reading this text because it is suggested in a discipline of considering the Scriptures called the Revised Common Lectionary – a three year cycle that brings to our attention the real breadth of the Scriptures - many ministers and churches follow it every week – we've chosen a different pattern here, focusing on one book or theme, but our psalm every week come from this lectionary – and during the great Christian seasons of the year, Advent/Christmas/Lent/Easter, we follow the lectionary – place ourselves in company with the church universal in considering the same passages of Scripture in congregations like this around the world – and it forces us to struggle with passages of Scripture that we would rather ignore – like this one – rooted in expectations of, hopes for, a conquering hero ('messiah') sent by an outraged God to redeem his people from the foreign forces of disruption, destruction, and death – the four horsemen of the apocalypse – the way things are going to end up for us - four riders on white, red, black, and pale horses symbolizing pestilence, war, famine, and death – images

rooted in and feeding traumatizing fear – that’s the feeling I get from the image I chose for this morning – traumatic, overwhelming fear – then, as many contemporary Christians seem to believe, Jesus will come with even more overwhelming power and glory to save us from these forces of evil – to pluck us out of this world being destroyed by the wrath of God and take us to the joys of a triumphant kingdom of heaven – in this version of the apocalypse, those we fear, those who are different from us, get destroyed and we get saved

- But I don’t think this ‘them and us’ version of hope in the redemptive work of God in Christ represents Jesus properly – Jesus does not show up as this kind of conquering hero – he shows up seeking justice through kindness and humility – he shows up inviting those who are different to sit with him at table and be nourished in his love – he shows up reconciling the world to himself, forgiving all our convoluted attempts to assume God’s power down through the generations, and makes us ambassadors of that message of forgiving and reconciling love – in the face of the strange expectations many in his times had of God’s redemption, he presented an even stranger one – the suffering servant in whom all would be redeemed and reconciled – in God’s time and in God’s ways – an open table where all people are healed – where the love of God casts out every fear you can imagine and reunites us as the kin God created us to be

### **How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?**

The human imagination does strange things when driven by fear – I don’t claim to understand all those dynamics, but my reading of history is that they have led us, far too often, to ignoring or rejecting the essentials of God’s redemption of the world in Jesus Christ – the work that the Holy Spirit is doing now, in our midst – instead of all these images of God returning with wrath and destruction, reflect on God being here now as host at God’s family table, inviting all to be nourished to flourish together in kindness and humility – a strange way of living, definitely, but the way of living, the way of hoping, to which God is calling us and nourishing us as ambassadors

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

