



## Gottesdienstangebote aus dem ELM

### **Predigtentwurf für den 07.12.2014** **2. Sonntag im Advent**

Der Predigtentwurf stammt von Johan Robyn, Mitarbeiter der „Lutheran Community Outreach Foundation“ (LCOF) in Johannesburg, Südafrika. Er arbeitet dort als Sozialarbeiter und Seelsorger im Stadtteil Hillbrow, einem sozialen Brennpunkt im Zentrum der Metropole.

Hillbrow ist durch Arbeitslosigkeit, Drogenmissbrauch, Prostitution und Kriminalität geprägt. Eintönigkeit und fehlende Perspektive bestimmen den Alltag der Menschen. Durch verschiedene diakonische Projekte hat die lutherischen Friedenskirche eine Sozialarbeit aufgebaut und in der LCOF organisiert, um diesen Teufelskreis zu unterbrechen und jungen Menschen eine bessere Zukunft zu ermöglichen.

Sie bietet durch ihre Angebote besonders Kinder, Jugendliche und junge Erwachsene anzusprechen und durch Kunst, Kultur und Handwerk auf inspirierende „Lebensreisen“ in eine bessere Zukunft einzuladen. Das ELM unterstützt die LCOF durch die Entsendung des Geschäftsführers Pastor Thomas Wojciechowski und finanzielle Zuschüsse. Mehr Informationen auf unserer Webseite.

**Predigttext:** Lukas 21, 25-33

#### **Signs of blossoming hope in our darkest winter**

As a child I had the privilege of spending most of my childhood upbringing in the midst of an agricultural landscape filled with vineyards and orchards. I was even familiar by how seasonal changes influence the growth of fruits, especially grapes in the producing of wine, and how the change in seasons brings forth a change in agricultural produce according to time and change. The change in season brought forth not only a change in the agricultural landscape but also a change in emotion. I was always intrigued by the time factor attached to it. Especially for us growing up in South Africa in the Southern Hemisphere of the world, December was always associated with long summer school holidays.

As seasons changed, fashion trends changed and developed over the year. The change in trends is always an indication that times are changing and also that something new is about to come. Times and trend influence and change clothes, technology, vehicles, politics, consumerism etc., basically all levels of society are influenced and changed by trends and time. Just imagine a society without

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trends. It is a society without change and without development - South Africa before 1994. Due to international political pressure, South Africa was finally forced to change. With the first democratic election in 1994 and the appointment of Nelson Mandela as president, a new development in its political landscape introduced a new era of change. Change in most cases is inevitable and if you as a society or as an individual don't change according to the trends, you will be left behind. The change in trends normally starts with signs and rumors and then a development is taking place. The change in trends is also prophetic in this sense that one sign is always an introduction of things that will happen in the future. September in South Africa is known as the time of spring. As we are preparing for the start of advent, the first blossom of trees are normally a sign that spring is in the air, winter is officially over.

The period of Advent is the countdown to Christmas and this period in the church year specifically demonstrates the authentic character of Christ through a weekly journey. The 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Advent is known as introducing the character of the love of Christ to this world. According to the Gospel of Luke in the watchword for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent (Luke 21:25-33), Jesus specifically talks about the signs that will occur in nature of his second coming. Jesus has been speaking about the destruction of the temple (vv. 5-6) and Jerusalem (vv. 20-24). He now turns his attention to the future of the world at large. The scene which Jesus describes is very catastrophic and talks about the signs in the cosmic world. **"There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and on the earth anxiety of nations, in perplexity for the roaring of the sea and the waves"** (v. 25). The sea is being likened to a roaring lion, **"the roaring of the sea and the waves"** (v. 25b) **"people fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world: for the powers of the heavens will be shaken"** (v. 26). Jesus talks about a fear that is so intense that people will die. **"Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to happen, look up, and lift up your heads because your redemption is near"** (vv. 27-28).

Then Jesus clarifies the signs of his second coming - it is not associated with destruction but rather associated with redemption. However, redemption also refers to being faithful. There is a movement away from a catastrophic, destructive cosmic sign to a more practical sign, the sign of the fig tree (vv. 29-30): **"See the fig tree and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see it and know by your own selves that the summer is already near."** The blossoming of the fig tree tells us that summer is near. To explain the cosmic turmoil Jesus uses a picture that is closer to home. For people in the Southern Hemisphere the signs in nature can be seen in a blooming green landscape in December. In Luke 21 Jesus says when you have seen the buds on the trees and know it means the coming of summer is near and when you see the great cosmic signs, you can be sure **"that the Kingdom of God is near"** (v. 31). His coming is near.

But then Jesus concludes this parables referring to signs (vv. 32-33) by saying **"Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things are accomplished. Heaven and**

***earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away."***

This conclusion of the parable firstly leaves me as the reader alert to the signs of the end times and at the same time it underlines how prophetic we as the church must respond to the signs during these times of advent. To respond to the signs of our times in South Africa today, the church is asked for a clear voice that talks to the way how the thread in the moral fibre of our society is being destroyed. This prophetic apocalyptic reference in Luke is a mirror reflecting the corruptive state of our societal being that has been degraded to a lesser value. Our society is caught up in complex societal ills like the abuse of illegal drugs and substances especially amongst our young people; corruption amongst all levels of society is an everyday occurrence. The society has become individualistic and commercialized filled with greed and vengeance and the South African society has lost its sense of caring. The sense of caring has been replaced by commercialized motives to get rich quickly and get caught in material values becoming part of the rat race of life. As a counselor in the inner-city community of Hillbrow I often need to talk to people who are emotionally stuck in their ways of living. In some cases parents are paralyzed by the death of their young child due to drug abuse, a single mother with a baby is stuck because she lost her job and is afraid of being thrown out of her flat, or a teenage girl is emotionally stuck when she found out that she is HIV-positive or a migrant family who fled from Zimbabwe to South Africa due to poverty, is stuck because their next meal is coming from a dustbin and the only place for them to sleep will be on the street in a cold and unsafe space. To be stuck means you have lost hope in God and that you have put your hope in the vulnerability of life.

Signs of blossoms have become clear indications of the blooming signs of spring budding in the fig tree. New things are coming. In Luke 21 the movement from a global destructive cosmic sign to a personal comparison relating to the parable of the fig tree explains Christ's concern. So the sign of hope becomes more real in the midst of our pain, vulnerability and emotionally unstable condition in which we as a society are in. The destructive cosmic world is opposite to a blossoming fig tree. Two signs, two worlds. A blossom represents the start of something new, something beautiful. The reference of Christ in the fig tree parable is prophetic and in this time of Advent also challenging. The challenge lies in his promise "***Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away***" (v. 33). Even if the world might fall, his promise will stay true and will not be shaken.

In a South African society where crime is at the order of the day, where the value of life has been diminished to a mere lesser extent and even where corruption has infiltrated the moral fibre of our society, hope is often gone.

How prevalent are the signs of hope in the German context? Has hope been replaced by commercialized materialistic ideas? Is hope visible in the fig tree? If so, then there is hope for the church and the world. Especially for us as believers the fig tree creates hope for

the church in South Africa and worldwide. The prophetic vision makes clear that in the midst of global signs there is hope in God.

Three months ago I started a journey with a 26-year-old student who as a child was molested by a family friend. The first signs of destruction and pain in her life were so real that she could not see any blossoming fig tree as a sign of hope, only destruction and pain. Through continued support and counseling she was able to see the first fruits of spring as a new sign of hope in her life. Christ gave this 26-year-old student the strength to move beyond her destructive being and see the hope for a better future.

Christ also gives us the ability to look and to move beyond our own destructive situation of hopelessness into hope. Hope is the secure anchor, Jesus Christ, in Him we place our trust, knowing that in the midst of a stormy sea we have the stability of hope secured in Christ.

According to *Oscar Wilde* his poem "**Spring Again**" talks about noticing the sun in the darkest days:

***"Once you reach the darkest days of winter,  
You notice that the sun is about to shine again  
The moment you accept spring is on the way."***

He talks about all of us having the ability to, in the midst of our darkest moment, see the sun of hope shining. We must have the ability to see beyond the signs of destruction and pain, seeing the blossoming signs of hope. Even in the deepest winter of pain, there are signs of hope. This applies to Zimbabwean refugee who struggles to find food in the dustbin and to the mother who has to cope with the death of her teenage son as well.

According to Luke hope is based on the promise given in v. 33 **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away"**. The author creates the tension between the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, the catastrophic signs of nature and the second coming of Christ. Hope is symbolized in the fig tree. See the fig tree, all the trees! You see it and know that the summer is already near. Hope is near, Christ, the blossoming hope in our darkest winter.

Johan Robyn