**Advent 1 2024 revised for Lessons and Carols**

 When our kids were little, one of the signs they had that Christmas was coming were the Advent calendars with chocolate and other goodies behind each little door. Each day, from the first day of Advent until Christmas Eve, they’d do the count down to the birth of baby Jesus and the coming of Santa Claus.

 I sometimes wish Advent was as simple and easy as opening a little door on the calendar, eating a piece of chocolate, and knowing that Christmas is one day closer. But it’s not. You and I both know the world is not that simple and life is not that easy.

 Maybe that’s why every year on this day, [the First Sunday of Advent](http://www.lectionarypage.net/YearC_RCL/Advent/CAdv1_RCL.html), we are invited to ponder the end of the world and the signs that will accompany that ending. This is not just a story about Jesus and his disciples. This is your story and my story. We experience it in our lives. We see it in our world. And today the Church declares it to be the good news of Christ. Yes, what sounds like bad news is actually good news.

 When Jesus says “There will be signs” he is speaking words of **hope** and reassurance that far too often are heard as words of warning and threat. And when they are, the signs are used to predict a future of impending doom, gloom and loss. They become indicators that the world will end and you had better shape up or God is going to get you. Our misunderstanding of the signs pushes us further into the darkness and deeper into our fear. Our misuse of the signs blinds us to the coming of the Son of Man with power and great glory.

 “There will be signs” are not Jesus’ words of warning and threats. Jesus does not ask up to predict the future. He never says these are the signs that the end of the world has come. Instead, he says that when we see the signs we are to stand up, raise our heads, and know that help is on the way; our redemption, our healing, our Savior have drawn near.

 I have a born again Christian friend who ties himself in knots trying to figure out the end of time. We were talking about this just the other day. I do my best to assure him that the signs are not a reason to hang our heads in despair or shrink from life. That we can see the signs in our lives and world means that the circumstances we face and the events that happen contain and reveal the promise of Christ’s coming. The signs are our hope and reassurance that God has not abandoned us, that God notices us and that God cares about, comes to, and participates in our life’s circumstances.

 Jesus’ parable of the fig tree teaches us how to read the signs. The Advent signs are as ordinary and common as a fig tree sprouting leaves. We see the leaves and we know something is happening. Summer is already near. It’s a new season, with new life, new growth, new fruit. That is the promise and good news of the Advent signs. And yet that promise, that good news, is fulfilled not apart from but in and through the reality of our life’s circumstances and our world’s events, no matter how difficult or tragic they may be.

 So, what if we looked on our lives and our world and we began to read and understand the signs in our Advent stories as sprouting leaves? What would we see? What would it mean?

 It would mean that the kingdom of God is near. It would mean we are entering a new season. We would see new life and new growth. We would produce new fruit. We could open the doors of our life with new courage and confidence. We could look on the world with a new sense of compassion and hope. We would be strengthened to do the work God has given us to do.

 Yes, the Advent seasons of our lives can be long, difficult, and painful. But we never face those seasons without the signs of hope and reassurance, signs that point to the one who is coming and who is already here.

**May it be so.**