

Text: Mark 13.28-31
St Stephen's

Dec 13/14, 2008
Sat/Sun

Living In Between

In the season of Advent we look at the OT prophecies of the coming of Christ, (and we have done that again this day in our service of Lessons and Carols). We find that for thousands of years the scriptures spoke of **someone who was to come**, and that somehow the destiny of the whole cosmos was tied up in his arrival.

We look as well at a second set of prophecies, that are again thousands of years old, and that say that the one who came two thousand years ago **will come back**, and come back **soon** – and that once again the destiny of the entire cosmos will be found in his return.

The bible tells us that his first coming **really happened**; it was an event in human history. No one disputes this. And the Lord himself promised that **his return** would be an event also. It will be **the end of human history**. So Advent is the time of the year where we look at **his comings**. His first coming, long prophesied. And his second coming, long awaited.

You and I are people who **live between** the first coming of Jesus and his second coming. This is a strange thing. We live **in between times**. We **look back** to what he has started and **look forward** to what he will finish. Always looking back and looking forward!

Jesus spent an important part of his last week talking to his disciples about how to look forward to the end of the world. They were coming out of the Temple, and they were impressed; it was the **largest Temple of the ancient world**. It rivaled any building in Rome – or anywhere else. Right there...

one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

Mark 13.1-2

That got their attention! All thrown down. And it would happen in 40 short years, when Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem. The ruins are still there, 2000 years later. And then Jesus went on to tell them that **a lot of things** are going to be **thrown down**. All thrown down to make room for something God was raising up. And it would all **come to completion when he came back**.

The disciples were the first ones to live in the 'in between time' – that season between his first coming and his second coming. That's where we live, too. It is a remarkable place to live.

This is a **small bookshelf** that sits on my desk. I made it when I was in shop in Jr High School about 50 years ago, and for some crazy reason it has survived all these years. I do not think I have anything from my life that has goes back farther than this, so it has become something special to me. It **has lasted** a long time. Not because it was very well made – probably because my Mom and Dad had it safe in their home during my 20's. Not much survived my 20's! But here it is.

The ends of this bookshelf **hold up everything** in between them. I think sitting on this bookshelf is kind of like living in the 'in between times'. The first and second comings of Jesus are **the bookends of our lives**. They **hold up everything in between**. They are actually the bookends of the entire cosmos, the anchor points of human history. And they do hold up everything in between. Everything.

I would like to make a couple of comments about **living in between** these great bookends, in between his comings...

In Between - You Can See the Passing of This Age

*For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.
There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.
These are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

Mark 13.8

Jesus says that **many things will fall apart**. Temples will be torn down. Governments will fall. Nations will fail. Careers will come to an end. Money will be worthless. Families and churches will be stricken. **Every human project** is destined to be swept away. Even the great mountains will crumble and the stars in the sky will be shaken. This is a frightening thing. I spend most of my life **holding things together**. But what he is saying is that the entire cosmos is a part of **an age that is irreparably broken**, and because of that it is passing away.

It's not hard to see these things when you look around. We feel the **tremors** when cancer strikes or a family is fractured or the stock market crashes or another politician fails or a job is lost. There are many tremors! We feel them – when **politicians fail**, when a stock market crashes, when our **bodies** succumb to disease or age, when you **lose a job**...

That is when **the bookends do their job**.

You look back to his arrival, and you know, "he came for me..." One of my good friends had someone say to her the other day that Jesus would **walk across the room** just to be with her. Those words meant the world to her. You look **back to the manger** and you remember; He actually **came a great deal farther** just to be with you. It holds you up, gives you strength. You look **back to his cross**, and his mercy sweeps your life again and again, pushing deeper into every last dark place in your heart.

You look forward to his return, and you know, the sufferings of this world are **not the end of the story**; you know He is going to fix it all. What he has **started**, he will **finish**. Those he loved at the **beginning**, he will love to the **end**. This **shepherd** will come and bring his sheep home. Jesus talked a great deal about hard times ahead, but he said that even these very hard times...

These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

We know about **birth pains**. They are tough. But they are **overwhelmed by the joy** of holding that baby. God is sweeping something out – something old and broken, and we live in **the in-**

between time when the old world can still make life very tough.

But he is **bringing in something new**, and it has already started and the joy of it will simply overwhelm and flood and heal every heart.

And that takes us to what else you can see...

In Between You Can See The Coming of Eternity

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Mark 13.31

Jesus said that a lot of things are going to be **swept away** – things that are not able to bear the weight of the age that is coming. “Heaven and earth will pass away...” was his phrase. That is a lot.

But **some things will last forever**. And if you can see what is passing away, you can also catch a glimpse of the things that will last forever. He is coming to restore all things. To fix everything.

- He spoke of a **new heaven and a new earth** that will last forever. It will be our home, and he is getting it ready. Sometimes I feel like I can almost see it.
- **Jesus’ words** will last forever. They are solid ground. His promises are bedrock true. Dependable. You can bet your life on them. His words will outlast the sun and the earth.
- **His mercy** will last forever. What is forgiven now is forgiven forever. His sacrifice has been taken into heaven. The lamb who was slain stands next to the throne above. His mercy is forever. I love being there with people when...
 - When forgiveness lifts a crushing sense of shame...
 - When a prodigal son or daughter returns home to a great celebration...
 - When Jesus is invited to a wedding, and water is turned to wine...
 - When a woman with a broken life finds living water...
- **People last forever**. That is worth thinking about. For better or worse, we last forever. Death is not the final word on any human life. Jesus will have the final word. And he has told us what that word will be for everyone who trusts in him.

Did you notice that in my little bookshelf – **the ends are joined** by a common base? That base **touches and lifts and hold everything that is set upon it...**

That is what life is like in between the comings of Jesus – we are **safe** there, **held** by him, **supported** by him, **living** for him, – **looking back** to his first coming, **looking forward** to his return. The base holds up the books and the ends help them stand straight, so that they won't fall off my desk, so that the books are useful and within reach.

With my little bookshelf, though, **sometimes my books slide off**. They just slide off and fall behind my desk onto the radiator or the floor. I think that sometimes that **happens to us**, too. We just slide off and fall to the floor. And it can seem like **nothing is working right**. Our pages are all torn and wrinkled, and we have lost all sense of why we are even here. We get **lost**; people like us can get lost.

Do you know what happens then? Well, my books have never yet learned how to crawl back up on my desk and get back into my bookshelf. They just can't seem to do that by themselves. But every time, **I have gone after them**. Because books on this shelf are special to me, and I care about them. So, I pick them up and dust them off, and bring them back up on my desk again. The one who came, the one who is coming back – **he still reaches out to lost people** today.

Maybe you are a bit **like a fallen book today**, pages torn and tussled, crashing off like far too hard. And you see him reaching to you, to pick you up and bring you up to a special place – where you really do fit. Could you **say 'yes' to him** as he reaches for you? He has a special place for you. He's **come across a long, long room just to find you**.

And if you are **on that shelf**, held up by his first coming, looking for his return, would you **stand tall** for him? Live **looking back** to his mercy, **held up** by his strength, and **looking forward** to his return. He's coming back soon.