

Suttons Bay Congregational Church
 Luke 21:25-36

December 3, 2006
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25"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

29He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32"I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

34"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. 35For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

During the week, I eat lunch around noon. I usually go down to the church kitchen, get my Lean Cuisine out of the freezer, open the box, slit the film on the top, stick it in the microwave, go back to my office while it cooks, forget it is down there, go back down thirty minutes later to heat it again, wait while it heats so I don't forget it again, grab a fork, get the Lean Cuisine out of the microwave, and return to my office to eat. When I'm finished eating, I throw out the Lean Cuisine container, wipe off my fork with a Kleenex, and then stick the fork in my top, right desk drawer to take downstairs later. I wish I could tell you that I do this because I'm so engrossed in my work that I simply can't separate myself from it long enough to go wash, dry, and put the fork away. But really I do this because I'm lazy.

But a few weeks ago I wasn't feeling lazy—I was feeling industrious. My sermon was finished, I'd given Danielle the bulletin outline for the following week, I'd made a few phone calls, answered my email, and I still had lots of energy. So, I decided it was time to clean out my desk. I began going through my desk drawers, including my top, right desk drawer. And in doing so, I confess that I found thirty-four forks in there. Now that's beyond lazy, that's just gross. Let me assure you that I washed all of those forks, disinfected them in the dish washer, and they are now back where they belong in the church kitchen. But they weren't there until just last week and so if you had to use a salad fork instead of a regular fork during the Harvest Dinner, I apologize.

Now you may be wondering why I'm telling you all of this? It's because confession is good for my soul, and I'd hazard it is good for most of your souls as well. However, confessing sin has fallen quite out of fashion in most mainline churches these days. We tell ourselves that we come to church to feel better, not to beat ourselves up by making a mental laundry list of all of the things we messed up during the week. But that denies the rich meaning and experience of true confession.

Though my example of confession is of a specific incident, fork hoarding, the incident is a result of an important and possibly much more harmful reality—my inclination towards laziness. Though my not returning forks to the church kitchen has little bearing on the future of your life

or mine; laziness, when taken to an extreme, does. If I am able to confess that I get lazy about the little things in life, then I am motivated to think about how I get lazy about the bigger things in life—like the health of my marriage, or my parenting, or my Christian discipleship. And in making that confession, in facing that realization, I am better able to overcome that sinful part of myself. Actually, I'm misrepresenting myself here. I am not the Most Valuable Player when it comes to overcoming sin in my life, that honor belongs to Christ through whom I have been redeemed. But, before I can know redemption, I must first engage in confession. And then in confessing, I know I am forgiven and in being forgiven I am redeemed, which is a very good thing indeed.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *náham*, which we translate as redemption, means to turn. This ancient word and its definition are fitting here—in confessing our sin and shortcomings we begin to turn our backs on sin as we turn our faces towards God. And in that turning, we experience the feelings of inspiration, joy, and freedom that are a result of being redeemed.

This is a fitting metaphor for the Advent season we begin today. This is a season of redemption—a season of turning away from sinful desires, distractions, and delusions so that we might more fully turn towards God. For that is what we do as we turn our heads, as the Wise Men did, toward the star that leads us to Bethlehem as we journey towards Immanuel—Go come to us as a helpless baby lying in a manger.

And part of the journey of getting to that Christ Child involves confession—letting God know that we realize how we've let God and others down, letting God know that we are sorry for what we have and have not done, and letting God know that we're ready to turn our backs on sin and turn to that star as we begin our Advent journeys to a manger where we will, once again, know the joy of redemption and new life in Christ. Thanks be to God for the opportunity to confess and feel the redemption that is ours through the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.