



# THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

## Father Alan's Blog

For the Second Sunday in Advent – December 5, 2021

*“Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom of God is near.”*

St. Luke 21:31 (NIV)

American author and Protestant Christian missionary to China Charles Richard “Dick” Hillis (1913–2005) tells the following story:

*“She was lying on the ground. In her arms she held a tiny baby girl. As I put a cooked sweet potato into her outstretched hand, I wondered if she would live until morning. Her strength was almost gone, but her tired eyes acknowledged my gift. The sweet potato could help so little – but it was all I had. Taking a bite she chewed it carefully. Then, placing her mouth over her baby's mouth, she forced the soft warm food into the tiny throat. Although the mother was starving, she used the entire potato to keep her baby alive. Exhausted from her effort, she dropped her head on the ground and closed her eyes. In a few minutes the baby was asleep. I later learned that during the night the mother's heart stopped, but her little girl lived.*

*“Love is a costly thing.*

*“God in His love for us (and for a lost world) ‘spared not His own Son’ to tell the world of His love.*

*“Love is costly, but we must tell the world at any cost. Such love is*

*costly. It costs parents and sons and daughters. It costs the missionary life itself. In his love for Christ the missionary often must give up all to make the Savior known. If you will let your love for Christ cost you something, the great advance will be made together."*



In today's Epistle Lesson (Romans 15:4-13), St. Paul quotes Isaiah, the "Advent Prophet", when he proclaims (in verse 12):

*"The Root of Jesse will spring up, One who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will HOPE in Him."*

Our Advent expectation of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ's coming is our hope our **only** hope for salvation. Accordingly, the thrill of expectation that we, as Christians, feel in these days leading up to Christmas Day should not be caused because we're excited:



**over the annual arrival of bulging stockings and mountains of presents; but, rather, because**



**Jesus Christ, as Saviour and Lord, is definitely coming (and even sooner than we may think),**

as evidenced by the myriad uncertain events currently going on:



**in the heavens; and**



**on the earth.**

In making this rather bold proclamation, I need look no further than today's Gospel Lesson (from St. Luke 21:25-33; his version of the "Signs at the End of the Age") – particularly verses 29-31 – wherein Jesus Himself promises us that the Son of Man is on His way:

*"Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near."*

In other words, Jesus is letting us know that we can stand firm and hold up our heads in the midst of the obvious chaos today, such as:



**constant wars;**



**uncertain economic times;**



**corrupt political leaders; and**



**natural disasters.**



**(Not to mention *countless people around this world* who are distraught by these unsettling events that they see happening all around them.)**

Nevertheless, Jesus implores His followers to have faith in the midst of such difficult times – precisely because these difficult times are **signs** that are intended to cause us to **hope** rather than to **despair**, as all these signs lead:



not to the *end*; but



to the *beginning*,



not to *destruction*; but



to *wholeness*,



because Almighty God's salvation **IS** at hand!

Therefore, we can stand firm in the words – the **promises** – of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!



In a sense, what we're being asked by Jesus to believe faithfully is a lot like:



**going into surgery.**

Now, as we know, surgery can be **difficult**:



for which to prepare;



through which to go; and



from which to recover.

Certainly, surgery is not a very pleasant thing – and not something that one would choose to do just for the fun of it – but we understand that the goal of surgery is not:



to make a person feel *worse*; but, instead



to make him or her feel *better*  
(that is, to “fix” what is “wrong”).

Likewise, the signs that are happening all around us are not supposed to cause us to lose heart, but, rather, **specifically because of them**, we are to be strengthened in our walk of faith. Thus, in the midst of:



the heavens; and



the earth

being shaken to the core, we can literally rejoice in the Lord Jesus and

are given by Him the ability to endure these times - as unpleasant and downright atrocious as they may be - because we have a loving God Who will see us through them.



In today's Gospel Lesson (St. , we learn the true nature of our hope for salvation. Specifically, **the fulfillment of all things in and through Jesus Christ means:**



**The complete destruction of all WORDLY aims, ambitions, and hopes; and**



**The spiritual consummation of the resurrected body with its eternal disposition, destiny, or fate.**

As Jesus Himself forewarns us in verse 26:

*"Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken."*

Let's make no mistake here: Jesus Christ's second coming - His immanent return - means a judgement upon all those who cling to:



**the passing things of this world; rather than to**



**Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, God's Incarnate Word Whose eternal "*words shall not pass away*".**

To this end, our Collect for today pleads:

*“... that by patience and comfort of God’s holy Word...”*,

we who believe on His name might have:

*“blessed hope of everlasting life eternal”*.

Thus, today’s Propers not only focus on Jesus Christ as the hope of our salvation, but also upon **God’s Holy Scriptures themselves**, as St. Paul writes in verse 4 of today’s Epistle Lesson (Romans 15:4-13):

*“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...”*

Therefore, we are all called to REALLY work at hearing the Holy Scriptures by reading them daily; what is more, we are, as today’s Collect petitions, to:

*“Mark, learn, and inwardly digest them...”*.



Accordingly, this **“Second Sunday in Advent”** is often referred to as **“Scripture Sunday”**.

The main purposes of God’s Holy Scriptures is to prepare us for:



The coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ in humility (that is, at His **BIRTH**); and



The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in judgement (that is; at His **SECOND COMING**).



**But, primarily, the Holy Scriptures teach us that *Jesus Christ alone is the hope of our salvation,***

for in Him all things, as prophesied in the Old Testament about the Messiah, are fulfilled. Subsequently, the New Testament, in general, and today's Gospel Lesson (St. Luke 21:25-33), in particular, reveals to us the fact that:



**Jesus Christ's first coming at his birth in the stable  
- in the fullness of time - as Saviour**



**Presages Jesus Christ's second coming, His final  
coming - at the end of time - as Lord and Judge.**

However, perhaps most importantly, the Holy Scriptures also ask us:



**to look at OURSELVES.**

Not surprisingly, then, because Advent is a time of preparation, it is also a time for introspection – for “taking stock” of where we are in our earthly walk with Jesus. That's why on this “Scripture Sunday” while we await the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I'd like us to take a few moments to take a long hard look at ourselves and at what we are called by Jesus, as His followers, to be about.

Now, those of us in the worldwide Traditional Anglican Church (and, especially, in the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada) too often pride ourselves about having the right **doctrine** – we proudly declare that:



**what we believe; and**



**why we believe it; and**



**how we worship as a result,**

is “apostolically sound” (for many of our church’s traditions go back to the time of the Apostles and of the Early Church Fathers).

But what about Jesus’ direct command to us – as contained in His “Summary of the Law” (St. Matthew 22:37-39; St. Mark 12:30-31; and St. Luke 10:27):



**to LOVE (that is, to “AGAPE”, not to “PHILEO”)  
BOTH God and neighbour?**

(By the way, there is not much difference, lexically speaking, between “agape” and “phileo”, or “brotherly love”. Both types of love involve a voluntary response:



**“I’ve decided to love you”,**

and an involuntary response:



**“I can’t help but love you”.**

However, there is not one God-given command to love in all of Holy Scripture that ever uses the word “phileo”.) Even so, “agape”, the highest of the four types of love found in Holy Scripture (the other two being “storge”, or “family love”, and “eros”, or “sexual love”), is:



**a selfless love;**



**a sacrificial love; and**



**an unconditional love,**

that perfectly describes the kind of love Jesus Christ has:



**for His Father; and**

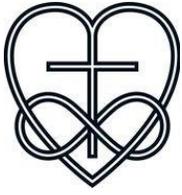


**for all His children,**



**whether they believe in Him or not.**

“Agape”, then, is not so much a feeling; but, rather, it is a deliberate act of one’s will, given unreservedly to everyone, and revealing an:



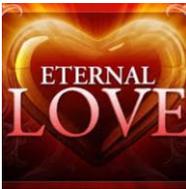
**unconditional;**



**immeasurable;**



**incomparable;**



**ongoing; and**



**self-sacrificing**

love and concern for a lost and fallen humanity:



**whether they deserve (or merit) it or not.**

As Swedish Lutheran theologian Anders Theodor Samuel Nygren (1890 - 1978), perhaps best known for his two-volume 1930 work "Eros and Agape", wrote:

*“Agape love’ is unmotivated in the sense that it is not contingent on any value or worth in the object of love. It is spontaneous and heedless, for it does not determine beforehand whether love will be effective or appropriate in any particular case.”*

Perhaps, the simplest (and, possibly, best way) to define “agape” is:



*“GOD” – for, as we know, God IS love.*

So, mark this down:

We, precisely because of our rich heritage as Traditional Anglicans, are in constant danger of becoming mere **“liturgical doers”**, rather than being **“true worshippers”** of Jesus Christ (to say nothing of being the **“lovers”** – **“agape-ers?”** – that God intended us to be; hence, many of us, having grown:



**complacent; and**

**smug,**

have lost the euphoria and love we felt when we first received Christ’s salvation. As a result, our attitude has all-too-often become one of “just going through the motions” and of dutiful obligation, such as:

*“Just tell me what I HAVE to do and I’ll do it.”,*

rather than one of joyful gratitude , such as:

*“After what you’ve done for me Lord, what can I POSSIBLY do in return?”*



Therefore, on this “Second Sunday in Advent”, let us remember our “First Love”, our Saviour Jesus Christ – and all that He did for us the first time He came to earth.

And, as we await our Lord’s second coming, let us endeavour to love (that is, to “agape”) others – ALL others – despite what it may cost us, in earthly terms, and to do everything in our power:



**to comfort them;**



**to heal them; and**



**to protect them.**

And as we worship together on this “Scripture Sunday”, let us:

**“...by patience and comfort of God’s holy Word, (continue to) embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of eternal life...”.**

For He is coming back – and soon.

*“Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.”*



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