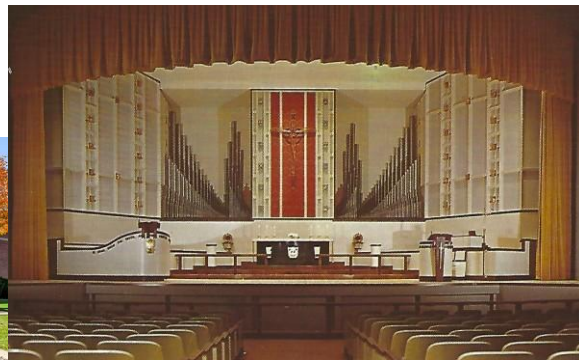


December 1, 2024  
The First Sunday in Advent, Year C  
Luke 21:25-36  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

## The Wasp Apocalypse

Two weeks ago, we were at Susquehanna University visiting Abigail and seeing one of the shows that she had done costumes for. Since we were there on a Sunday, we, of course, went to worship at the campus chapel where Abigail serves on the sexton crew, which means that she helps set up and clean up from worship and helps to lead the worship services. That Sunday, she served as a lector for one of the readings and as a communion assistant.

I'm pretty sure that it was during the sermon, when I noticed it. A big, brown wasp was flying around the chapel.



Weber Chapel Auditorium

The chapel at Susquehanna is not exactly what you'd picture when you think of a chapel on a college campus. Its full name is Weber Chapel Auditorium and it seats 1,500 people. Well, not even in my day did 1,500 people come to worship, so the auditorium seating in the chapel is usually only used when well-known guest performers that people from the larger community will want to see come to campus, for the annual Christmas Candlelight service, and for other big events at the university.

Weber has a rotating stage, with one side being a traditional theater stage and the other side a worship chancel, complete with pipe organ. For Sunday worship chairs are set up on the stage, facing the chancel, with the worshipers' backs toward the auditorium seating. But when we were there two Sundays ago, the chancel was already set up for the Candlelight service so instead of facing the pipe organ and the altar, we were sitting in chairs on risers that were facing the auditorium and the chaplain had his back to the auditorium as he preached and presided over the service.

Which means that he didn't see the wasp. Of course, I was trying to focus on the sermon. But I'm really not a fan of wasps, so I really wanted to keep an eye on it. I wanted to know where it was at all times. As I just described, the chapel is enormous, so I wasn't panicking, yet, as the wasp was making lazy circles around the auditorium part of the chapel, far away from us.

The chaplain was preaching on the apocalypse in the gospel of Mark, when Jesus' disciples were talking about the size of the stones that made up the temple and Jesus gave them the shocking news that the great stones and the great buildings that made up the temple complex would be thrown down. He was preaching about the warnings we hear in the gospel of Mark, similar to those we hear in our gospel reading from Luke today, that those things that we imagine are permanent someday will cease to be. In Mark Jesus tells his disciples, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines." (Mark 13:8)

But while the chaplain was preaching about putting our trust in God and not in the things of these world, that can and will be thrown down, I was watching a wasp and hoping it wouldn't get any closer.

It did.

The sermon was over, we had said the creed and prayed the prayers, when I noticed John brush something out of his hair. It was the wasp. We sat down for

the offering. I noticed Cyrus and Reese whispering about something. It was that the wasp had landed on the person sitting in front of them. And then Cyrus jumped up, mumbled something about going to the bathroom and left the stage. Reese told me that the wasp had landed on him and he was out of there. He didn't come back for a long time.

The service continued through the Great Thanksgiving and the eucharistic prayer. We all took communion, all except Cyrus, who still hadn't come back from where he was hiding in the bathroom.

Finally, he came back basically for the closing hymn. As the hymn started, I noticed the chaplain's wife brushing something off of the chaplain's robes.

You guessed it. It was the wasp. It flew across the chancel and all of a sudden, the organ music stopped. The organist said, "Keep going," so we all kept singing, "O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come." It took maybe a verse before the organ music joined us again. Luckily, Susquehanna is a strong music school, so we hadn't gotten out of tune.

Why had the music stopped? Yes. It was the wasp, which had flown right in front of the organist and landed on the music.

When the service ended. Cyrus filled us in on what had happened to him when he had decamped from the worship service to go and hide in the bathroom. There had been a wasp in the bathroom. A different one, of course, because the one that had joined us for worship was definitely still in the chapel.

I wish I could tell you more about the sermon Chaplain Kershner preached that Sunday, or what we prayed in the prayers of intercession, or what hymns we sang. But mostly, all I can tell you about that service, other than that Abigail did an excellent job with her reading, is a play by play of the antics of an invading wasp. And why was that the most important thing about the worship service to me? Because I was afraid of it.

Since the gospel reading and Chaplain Kershner's sermon were both about apocalypses, my family decided to call that worship service, "The Wasp Apocalypse."

Here we are, on the first Sunday of Advent, and what do we have for our gospel reading? Certainly nothing that the world has told us to expect. According to the world the Christmas season has begun. Christmas music, Christmas shopping, Christmas events and activities, Christmas tree lightings, Christmas movies. Christmas everything and everywhere.

But not here. At least not in our gospel reading. Instead, we have the Advent apocalypse.

The beginning of the gospel of Luke gives us beautiful Christmas stories, the stories that shape most of the way that we picture the religious part of Christmas.

But today's gospel reading is not from the beginning of the gospel of Luke. It's from the end of the gospel of Luke and in it, Jesus tells us about the end. At the beginning of chapter 21 of Luke, Jesus talks about the end of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem, similar to the apocalypse from the gospel of Mark that I talked about earlier in this sermon. But in the part of chapter 21 that makes up our gospel reading, Jesus talks about more cosmic apocalypses, the beginning of the end.

He talks about, "...signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves." (Luke 21:25) It's some scary stuff.

And Jesus knows it's scary. He warns his listeners, "People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Luke 21:26)

Perhaps we know what that feels like. Things being shaken, distress among nations, the roaring and waves of the rising seas, hurricanes in the mountains of North Carolina, people fleeing famine, violence, droughts, floods. Wars in places

we perhaps never expected war, at least not again. Wars in places that have always seemed to be on the brink of war.

Perhaps we feel ready to faint with fear about what is happening, about what is coming. Perhaps all we can focus on is the wasp in the room.

Jesus told us there would be days like this. But Jesus also told us that when days like this come, we are called to stand up and raise our heads, Jesus told us that our redemption is drawing near. (Luke 21:28)

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus tells us not to let ourselves get distracted, not to let ourselves be consumed with the things of this world, with dissipation and drunkenness, and the worries of this life (Luke 21:34) but instead to be focused, alert, to be on guard, to keep our hearts and minds, to keep our eyes focused on Jesus. Because no matter what is happening around us, no matter what is ending, no matter what is beginning Jesus is the one thing that we can count on, the eternal good, who has come for us and who is coming for us. That is what we are called to focus on. Not on holiday excesses. Not on our anger. Not on our cynicism. Not on our fears.

At least some members of my family and I essentially missed an entire worship service, because we were distracted by the wasp in the room; by the perception of the present danger, by our fear of being stung. And so, to some extent, we missed Jesus coming to us in word, in sacrament, in song, in community, distracted as we were by the wasp apocalypse. And it was only a wasp, though it was a pretty big wasp. And it didn't even sting anyone.

In some ways, an argument could be made that in that worship service, at least some members of my family and I failed the Advent 1 test. We let the things of this world take our eyes off of Jesus. We let ourselves be consumed by the fears of this world.

Instead, we are called, by our gospel reading for today, not to focus on our fears of endings, of changes all around us. Instead, we are called to hope, shaped

by the Advent promise, that Jesus, who came to us at Christmas, who comes to us in word, in sacrament, in song, in community, and who is with us wherever we go and whatever we're going through, will come again.

And this is our Advent prayer. Not that fears go away, not that wasps go away, not that things of this world would be permanent and unchanging, but simply this: that someday in power and cloud and great glory, our Lord Jesus would come again, and that in the meantime, in this world of fears and distraction, he would help us keep our eyes, our hearts, our thoughts fixed on him. And so, we pray. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.