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**The Message:** Holding Back to Make Space

Why apocalypse, the end of time, at the beginning of Advent?

The meaning of apocalypse is literally, 'uncovering' -- the uncovering of something that has been hidden. Hence the title of the last book of the bible, the revelation of secrets about the end of times. - hidden things revealed by God -- intended to show God's way of dealing with humans, and God's ultimate purposes.

The SOMETHING HIDDEN that is being uncovered is the will of God

Apocalyptic writings (200 BCE and 100 ACE.) warn us about dire future consequences of not living according to God's will.

Today we are encouraged to watch for signs of the coming of God's will.

Noah saw a sign of the times and built an ark.

Jeremiah saw a sign of the times and predicted downfall which didn't happen until fifty years after he died.

Prophets consistently saw the signs of the times and warned the people to change their lives for the sake of God's will.

But there are always people predicting doom and gloom, seeking to change the way we think and act through fear.

How do we know if any of them are true? And how do we survive the bombardment of people seeking to panic us?

It's all about watching for the signs of the times.

The Cambridge English Dictionary definition of 'signs of the time' puts a negative spin on the phrase: "something that is typical of the (bad) way things are now"

Jesus says, 'yes, there will be terrible things that happen in the world.' But in this passage he is telling us to look for the good news of God's will being revealed.

"Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

And in this respect, we are either Roosters or Owls.

Last week, when Jesus was asked what the end times would be like for humans, he used the analogy of sheep and goats. He mentions the fig tree in today's scripture. Keeping to the theme of the natural world showing forth God's will, and risking you thinking I spend all my time at our farm, it's roosters and owls that speak to me this morning.

Roosters are ancient Christian symbols, found on third century sarcophagi in the Catacombs under Rome -- at Christ the shepherd's side, perhaps a symbol of the resurrection

The owl -- ancient symbol for wisdom - goes back all the way to ancient Greece

Roosters are anxious to announce the dawn; squawk loudly and warn of coming morning. They want the night to end.

When we bought our farmhouse, we were to inherit two roosters and 7 mostly post menopausal chickens. The head rooster was a beautiful bird: iridescent navy blue tail, tawny saddle and hackle, a brilliant red comb. It was so wonderful, that a chicken farmer the other side of the bay brought over a hundred of his 1000 birds to breed. That rooster took one look at this new harem and flew the coop permanently.

When we let the hens and the browbeaten second in command out every morning, he would join them in crowing from the woods in the back forty -- he always sounded angry perhaps because we didn't let the hens out till gam, being city farmers. He never graced us with his presence, though he would have been much safer in the coop.

Owls are birds of the night. They know that the night continues; that the fox is about and the farmer is still in bed. They are reluctant to welcome the dawn.

We have a lot of roosters in our world -- crowing various messages of danger: The message always seems to be, "Panic big time!"

Owls are not so plentiful in our day. Wisdom, reticence to act hastily, these are not characteristics we see much of. But we need to hold back from judging too quickly because we can't know the true nature of the time.

Only in hindsight will we understand the consequences of what we have lived through.

With the death of President George H. W. Bush, I've been reflecting on how critiques of his presidency changed

- harshest during his presidency and when he first left office;
- improved in comparison to his son;
- and now he seems almost saint like and not just because he died.

The only things we can be sure of:

- there will be change and
- some things will stay the same.

Perhaps we need a little of the rooster in us to point to the changes, so that we can decide if they are to be welcomed or avoided. But we need a lot of the owl in us to hold back to reflect.

Jesus tells us to be wary. To watch the signs around us. To be wakeful so that we see the signs of the future unfolding.

Jesus points out a fig tree: how tiny buds appearing signals that spring is coming. Care enough to see the little signs -- the signs aren't the big dramatic things -- watch for a leaf to bud.

Learn to read the signs rooted in the presence of God.

"What are the signs that Christ is coming with light and hope through the darkness?"

Laurie Cooper, saw a video of Hassan Al Kontar, a young man trapped in limbo between nations, who spent 7 months in an airport in Kuala Lumpur and two months in a detention centre. Laurie turned this from a negative sign of the times to a sign of what God's will is for all. This week Kontar arrived in British Columbia to begin a new life in Whistler.

Jesus challenges us to pray that we will have the strength to escape the things that will befall the world. Paul promises that God will "strengthen you to the end!" -- that we have what we need for our time, for all time:

- you have the Grace of God in your speech and knowledge;
- and the witness of Jesus in your heart.

You are not lacking any spiritual gifts you need to see signs of God's will unfolding.

Even in the midst of dark times, just when you are sure that life will never be bearable, Jesus tells us that is when there are signs that the new age of God's kingdom is near.

That's what is unique about Jesus' message. He teaches us to look for the positive signs of God's will being revealed.

Why in Advent do we hear about the end times?

So that we don't listen so intently to the roosters of this world crowing or tweeting about the latest catastrophe. So that we aren't overwhelmed by the constant barrage.

So that we seek out the owls -- the wise folk who are writing more than 149 characters -- who think longer and more deeply, more carefully, more faithfully before they utter words of wisdom.

So that we know how important it is to prepare ourselves, to be wise enough to uncover God's will for the world in the coming of Jesus.

Jesus tells us, 'Pray a lot. Pray that you will not be distracted by the things of this world. Look to the buds of the fig tree, the little things, the unexpected things that turn us to something beautiful.' Look to the birth of a newborn.'

Advent is your time: your time to hold back from the panic, to make space within, to welcome Jesus into your heart and into your life.