

SPECIAL  
SUNDAY

897

UNITED METHODIST  
STUDENT DAY

SERMON STARTER



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The people of The United Methodist Church®



# UNITED METHODIST STUDENT DAY

## SERMON STARTER

While your congregation may observe it at any time, United Methodist Student Day is traditionally celebrated on the fourth Sunday of November. In 2021, the date coincides with the First Sunday of Advent. This sermon starter is based on the lectionary readings for November 28, 2021 and can be adapted for any Sunday and to fit your context.

The liturgy, offering talk and children's message are designed to work together with the sermon or may stand alone to celebrate United Methodist Student Day in your congregation.

### LUKE 21:25-36, NRSV

The church's preparation for Christmas and our culture's preparation for Christmas look remarkably different. The stores have already been priming us for the Christmas shopping season since they sold the last of their Halloween candy weeks ago. Our family reunions connecting around the Thanksgiving table after last year's pandemic quickly moved into the frenzy of weekend sales.

Yet here in the church, the Christmas season doesn't actually begin for four weeks. In the

meantime, beginning today, we are in a time of Advent. And while we tend to be lulled into preparing for the beautiful peaceful image of the baby Jesus born in a barn, every year, the lectionary instead hands us an apocalyptic Gospel reading for the first Sunday of Advent. We are told to expect not a baby Jesus, but the second coming of Jesus, not as a baby in the manger but "coming in a cloud' with power and great glory."

The opening of Advent brings us to the time right before Jesus was arrested. He was teaching in



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the temple and some of the people were admiring the stones and the grandness of the house of God. But Jesus tells them “‘As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.’ They asked him, ‘Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?’”

And Jesus shares all of the chaos that will take place.

- The signs of the sun and the moon.
- The nations in distress.
- The changing of the seasons.

Signs that every generation has experienced. These broad manifestations that we have endured throughout the pandemic that caused so much suffering and distress.

*Does this mean that we should expect to meet Jesus soon and very soon?*

**Yes.**

That is Jesus’ point. We should always expect it. We are called to live our lives in a way that keeps us focused on the lessons that Jesus taught us. We don’t respond in this way out of fear or because we don’t want to be “left behind.” We align ourselves

with Jesus’ teachings and find a sense of sturdiness in life. Our relationships with God and with one another deepen and grow stronger.

For God so loved the world that God came down to live among us. This in-breaking of God’s love as one of us is not to erase suffering in the world but to walk with us through it. To equip us to be healers and hope bringers and equip us to share Advent with others.

College students like Katrina experienced the Advent of God’s love through the church. Her pastor and church family encouraged her to apply for a Gift of Hope Scholarship that she says permitted her to follow God’s direction for her life. “I know that God is calling me to team with him in restoring his beautiful creation,” she said.

The Bible uses variations of the command “do not fear” hundreds of times and today we hear the variation “do not worry.” Perhaps you have found yourself in a situation where you are worried about money or other responsibilities. It becomes a distraction.

For many college students, covering the cost of school creates a stressful situation. They can



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be distracted by their studies because they are concerned about their course load, how to pay for college and books or if they will face a future of debt. But knowing the church is behind them and rooting for them while offering financial support is encouraging.

And perhaps you feel that you have your own financial worries. It can be challenging to imagine that the little that you can offer will make a difference. But the beauty of coming together as Advent people is that it's not just your gift. Your gift joins with countless others to make a real difference.

What happens when we take a fresh look at this season that so often is layered with overindulgence, parties that lack a sense of true community and arguments over what designs should be on holiday coffee cups? If we examine these traditions, we are likely to find that they keep us from experiencing the fullness of Advent.

Jesus advises staying alert.

- Being aware of the excess.
- Be alert to crossing into behavior that you don't feel good about.
- Be alert to behavior that is disruptive to your relationships with people in your life.
- Be alert to behavior that disrupts your relationship with God.



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As we enter this season, this liminal time that is often described as “already but not yet,” how do we engage in festivities that resist self-indulgence, but that celebrate Emanuel, God with us?

Today we have an opportunity to share Advent hope when we make a gift to the United Methodist Student Day special offering. Please give generously. Your gift is an intentional step that reaches beyond superficial excess and prepares hearts, families, communities:

- for real love,
- for authentic presence,
- for genuine hope,
- for sincere relationships,
- for unparalleled joy,
- for the richness of the meaning of Christ who comes on a cloud of power and glory into our lives.

Amen.



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