

*25 "There will be 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. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

*29 Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."*

I grew up in a world of pastures, woods, and creeks, a world where a muskrat would dive into the water and disappear; cottontails would freeze for a moment hoping the intruders would pass by and then bound off away from the danger. Once in a great while I would glimpse a flash of orange – a fox out in the open just for a moment then vanished into the brush and the brambles. Even more rare in those days was the sight of a deer, leaping through a valley in our woods, then gone as quickly as he had appeared. One day there was the possum in the middle of Mason Road – my neighbor Scott and I took sticks – poked at it. We decided it was dead – left it alone. A while later we looked back at where the possum had been and it was gone – it had been playing possum all along. From time to time there was a box turtle - not a racer – kind of big – slow moving. When I shoved a stick in the turtle's direction head and feet withdrew into its shell. In my pasture and creek and woods world the creatures had all sorts of responses to danger. Hiding, freezing, running, pretending, withdrawing - every creature had its own way.

What is your way? When there is an intruder in the forest how do you respond? Are you a turtle, withdrawing, protecting, risking nothing?

Are you a little rabbit frozen in fear?

A fox or a muskrat or a deer, racing off to a safe place of hiding?

A possum, sleeping, hoping to awake in a better situation?

These days every time you open a newspaper or turn on a TV or listen to the radio you encounter another reason to worry. Was it just a year ago that they were picking up the pieces after Katrina or are they picking them up still? The tsunami? 9/11? Y2K? Now every day it is Iraq, Israel and Palestine, Sudan. Ford offering buyouts, jobs moving to India or China. Co-pays on medical insurance going up, the federal deficit needing attention. Jobs harder to find, houses not selling as well. If anxiety is your drug of choice there is a good reason to be anxious every moment. Are you hiding, freezing, running, pretending, withdrawing?

Jesus spoke of times like these. *“There will be signs in sun, moon and stars, and on earth distress among the nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”*

Fear and foreboding – two words that describe so many of the conversations I hear: fear and foreboding.

But Jesus has a different word for his followers: *Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

Stand up and raise up your heads.

Look to God - to Christ. When the forest is coming apart with intruders and the trees are crashing down for you who belong to Jesus it is not the time for hiding, freezing, running, pretending, withdrawing – for you who belong to Jesus it is time to stand up and lift up your heads – time for faith in God.

In the animal world it is everyone for himself or herself but that is not the way for the followers of Jesus. When my neighbor loses a job should I choose the response of the turtle, withdrawing – protecting myself? Or will I choose to be guided by Jesus – praying for ways that I may be led to walk with my neighbor. Will fear and foreboding be my response or will I look to the one who is my redemption, Christ?

When there is news of more homeless people every day will I stay glued to my TV, shaking my head over what is happening to this world or will I turn off my TV and go to work with Jesus to provide warmth and shelter that is so needed?

When flooding devastates the people of a neighboring county will I let the worries of my day to day life so occupy me that I will have no time to offer? Jesus warned: *“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

Now I had to look up the word dissipate – it means to scatter. Do our lives get so scattered that we have no time to help our neighbors? Are we so caught up in all the busyness and the entertaining ourselves with sports and media and going out to eat and worrying about what will be that we stop looking to God – fail to seek Christ’s way in these complicated times? Instead of being scattered what if your life and mine were focused on sharing the love of God? What if instead of moaning and groaning about how things are we stood up, and raised up our heads? Christ is near.

He meets you here - comes to you again, here in his body and blood. He fills you with himself and with faith. You are not just another animal in the forest – you belong to the one who is coming.

Jesus.