

We are in a season of signs. Signs are everywhere in our lives, and they tell us all kinds of things.

They can provide *information*. ‘Day-After Thanksgiving Sale’. ‘Doors open at 5 AM’.

Signs can be *warnings*. ‘Sharp curve ahead’. ‘Watch for ice on bridge’. ‘Slippery when wet’. ‘Speed limit 45/mhr – radar enforced’.

Signs can attempt to elicit *a response* from us.’ ‘Free shipping on orders of more than \$ 25.00’. ‘Good while supplies last’. ‘Sale ends at 9 AM.’

The Gospel for today speaks to us about signs. Signs that give us information. Signs that are warnings. Signs that are intended to elicit a response.

In today’s Gospel we encounter Jesus teaching in the Temple. As Luke tells the story, Jesus has just finished with a prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

After Jesus tells his listeners about how it will be when Jerusalem is destroyed, He begins with a new prophecy – a prophecy of how it will be at the ‘end of things’:

*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.*

*People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the
world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Signs. Signs of warning. Signs with information.

Signs in the heavens – Jesus tells us that ‘the powers of heaven will be shaken.

Signs in the world – Jesus tells us that nations will be confused and distressed.

Signs in the lives of humanity – people so full of anxiety – that Jesus tells us the people will faint from fear.

Popular Christianity today is almost obsessed with these signs of warning and information. By Popular Christianity, I mean that Christianity that finds its way onto the cover of Newsweek and Time magazine a couple of times a year. The kind of Christianity that is the staple of many televangelists and some entire denominations.

This idea of ‘popular Christianity’ isn’t anything new. Those of us who were born before 1960 probably remember Hal Lindsey and *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. And I can’t imagine very many people who haven’t heard of *The Left Behind* series, written by Tim LaHaye & Larry Jenkins.

During my days at Oral Roberts University in the mid 1970’s, it was not at all unusual to see earnest students pouring over a set of books something like this list:

- *The Bible* - bookmarked at selected passages from The Revelation to John, The Book of Daniel, and this passage from Luke, along with similar passages from Matthew and Mark.
- *You’d want to have a world atlas* – hopefully one that was color-coded to show the United Nations, the European Common Market, all the communist countries, and all the ‘Arab or Muslim countries.’
- And of course you’d need to have your own copy of *The Late Great Planet Earth*.

Hal Lindsey had countless numbers of people obsessed with the signs that he identified as ‘proof’ that the second coming of Jesus was at hand.

There was a big problem with all that. At least I know that ***I had*** a problem. We were reading *The Late Great Planet Earth* in far greater detail – than we were reading the Bible. We were more focused on ***who*** the Antichrist might be – or ***where*** he might come from – on whether or not he might already be alive!!! For heaven’s sake – we read and studied *The Late Great Planet Earth* in more detail than we read and studied the Bible. ***We thought about – and talked about the Anti-Christ more than we thought or talked about Jesus.***

We knew more about the United Nations resolutions that created the state of Israel – then we knew about Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. We could have told you – in

great detail – just how it was that a unique combination of the European Common Market, the Soviet Union and the Chinese, and the Arabs were going to attack Israel – and signal the 2nd coming of Jesus.

But I bet we couldn't have had a sustained conversation on the parables of Jesus. Or how the lessons from the Sermon of the Mount had application in our lives.

And we completely missed the punch line in today's Gospel.

We were so obsessed with what *we thought* were signs of warnings and signs of information – that we altogether missed the point. The point of all those signs – whatever the signs really are – is to elicit a response from us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that we are to do. *Stand up and raise up your heads – because your redemption is drawing near.*

Then he told them a parable: 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.

This *is not* a message that should cause us to faint. It *is not* a message that should fill us with fear and foreboding. This is a message of hope. A fig tree sprouting is a sign that spring is coming. It is a sign of hope and abundance.

I need messages like this from today's Gospel to remind me to read and study all of the Bible more and Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye less.

Every time that we gather around this Table we also see signs.

Do you see a sign that says 'offer good while supplies last'? Do you see a sign that says 'sale ends at 9 AM?'

When we gather at this table look into the faces of the people with whom we stand or kneel. Look at the gifts of bread, wine, the gifts to children of women who are in prison, and the gifts of our earthly treasure

Do you those faces and gifts as signs?

We need to look for and see the signs that tell us of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. Signs that tell us that widows and orphans are being cared for. We need to look for and see signs that tell us that the ‘tax collectors and the prostitutes’ of *our day* are welcome to eat at the same table that we do. Because, *we* too are guests at this table also.

We need to look for and see signs that tell us that we live in a society and that we worship in a church that is working to bring about peace on earth – and goodwill to all people.

When you see these signs: *Stand up and raise up your heads – because your redemption is drawing near.*