

experience the liberating, saving power of God. The sign of the figtree further reinforces hope: It was the deadest tree in winter but with the first sign of spring suddenly blossomed; people saw it as a sign of God's blessing. They are to face the future with courage, trust and hope, not giving up to despair. God's transforming power will dispel old tyrannies and create communities of peace, justice, safety and solidarity.

### 7. Closing Prayer

Grow in us, Lord Jesus,  
Grow in our spirit, in our hearts,  
in our imagination, in our mind.  
Grow in us in your gentleness,  
in your humility, your eagerness, your love.

Think in us, Jesus  
then will our thoughts be clear and radiant.  
Speak with us, Jesus,  
then will our speech be gentle and true.  
Work through us, Jesus  
then will our deeds be just.

Fill our whole being  
so that in us  
all may read your gracious love.

You give us the capacity to change,  
to bring about a world that mirrors your  
wisdom, create in us a desire to act in  
solidarity so that the pillars of injustice  
crumble and those now crushed are set  
free.

Linda Jones (CAFOD)

*Heavens drop dew from above,  
let the earth open up  
and a saviour spring forth.  
Come, O Lord, O Come for our saving.*

*Isaiah 45:8*



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**Making Space for Grace**  
**First Sunday of Advent 2018**



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## 1. Welcome and Opening Prayer

Jesus, you are the hope in our messy world. Help us slow down, listen to your voice and focus on what's really important. We want to become the-best-version-of ourselves. Fill us with a deep, strong peace.

May we stay aware of the joy you bring into our lives.

May the light of your love always shine in our hearts.

Dispel the darkness of our world with the light of your love and let us find ways we can bring light.

Through the journeys of our lives bless us with healing and hope, and through your blessings may we know your joy with us:

Star-maker,

Light of the world,

Fire of holiness,

Love without end. Amen

Carole Birley and Philippa Pearson (adapted)

## 2. Gospel text: Luke 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your hearts, because your redemption is drawing near."

He told them this parable: "Look at the figtree and all the trees. When they sprout

leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you will know that the kingdom of God is near.

"Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

## 3. Quiet moment

*People can read over the text for themselves and pick out words or short phrases that strike them and say them out loud. When everyone has had a chance to say their word or phrase, they can then reflect silently for a moment or two and then briefly say why such a word/phrase struck them – in relation to themselves or their community or the world*

## 4. Reflection Questions for Luke 21: 25-36

1. What sustains you in winter when plants and trees are at their deadest?
2. How does being with a small gospel-sharing group help you live your life?
3. Who is doing what is 'right and just' in your community? (cf first reading Jeremiah 33:15)

## 5. Prayers

*Mentioning the people and situations we want to pray for.*

## 6. Background Notes for Luke 21:25-36

Luke wrote his Gospel for people born gentile living in Greek territory. He himself was a doctor, an educated, cultivated man, born in Antioch (Syria) and either of pagan or Greek origin. In this chapter he situates Jesus in Jerusalem for the last time before his trial and execution. People coming to him in the temple have been remarking on its magnificence but he foretells its destruction – which happened in AD 70.

Scholars disagree about whether Luke, in describing the whole structure of the world showing signs of collapse, is referring to the fall of Jerusalem or to the 'end time'. But the signs he mentions are such as to produce profound anxiety, confusion and fear in the hearts of his followers. In Jewish tradition the 'sea' was taken as a great reservoir of evil bound by God at creation.

Even with the stark, unrelenting description of coming terror, Jesus is more concerned with preparing his followers for the evils of persecution and for holding on to faith in very difficult circumstances. The reference to 'cloud' refers to the unseen, mysterious but real presence of God, a sign of hope. He assures them they will not be left desolate but