

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 experience the liberating, saving power of God. The sign of the figtree furthers 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. The new world to come will be a different one, a better one, one in which we will be changed.

### 7. Closing Prayer

Come close to us, Lord,  
come very close.  
Come Alpha and Omega  
who is from before the ages.  
Come, Son of Joseph, Son of Mary  
Come Morning Star-maker who named the stars  
Come carpenter of Nazareth  
who knows the smell of planed wood.  
Come beloved of God  
who knows the heart of God,  
Come, Son of Man  
who knows the hearts of people.  
Come Lord of Life and Prince of Peace.  
Come Dayspring and Rising Sun,  
Come wonderful Counsellor.  
Come, Emmanuel, God with us.  
God very close to us.  
Amen

Ged Johnson

### Protea

A genus of South African flowering plants, also called sugarbushes. Found also in the Golan Heights and Mediterranean countries. (Afrikaans:suikerbos)



Protea  
Symbol of Transformation

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### Partners in Faith

C/O Sophia Housing Association,  
25 Cork Street, Dublin 8.  
Tel: 453 5348  
Email: [info@partnersinfaith.ie](mailto:info@partnersinfaith.ie)  
Website: [www.partnersinfaith.ie](http://www.partnersinfaith.ie)

Making Space for Change  
First Sunday of Advent 2021

## 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. Texts

### 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 fig-tree 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 time...

*People can read over the gospel text again and pick out a word or short phrase that strikes them and say it out loud. When everyone has had a chance to speak, people can silently listen to what God is saying to them in their hearts linking it with themselves, their community, society or the world. Then some sharing.*

**NB** This is not time for argument.

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

1. Covid caused many changes; what ones are you glad about?

2. 'Something that will not acknowledge conclusion insists that we forever begin.'  
Comment

Brendan Kennelly, 'Begin'

## 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