



SAINT LUKE'S

ADVENT 2
YEAR C

JEREMIAH 33:14-16
1 THESSALONIANS 3:9-13
LUKE 21:25-36
PSALM 25:1-9

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN
DECEMBER 2, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.

Today in the first Sunday in Advent, we mark the beginning the Church's new year. Nowadays, we usually hear about the Sundays of Advent being a series celebrations of peace, hope, joy, and love. More traditionally, the themes of the four Sundays in Advent were a call to remember the last four things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. While those aren't nearly as pleasant to dwell on, it really does take a balance of death, judgment, heaven, hell, peace, hope, joy, and love to better understand the role of the Advent of Christ in our lives. Advent is a time of preparation in anticipation of these things as God's future unfolds in Christ. Advent is when we look back in time at the coming of Jesus in the past, while remembering that he has promised to come to us again in the future. In looking back to remember his first Advent, the Church compels us to prepare our hearts, our lives, and this world for his return.

In the collect for today, we pray that God would "give us grace to cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life..." The works of darkness are those things which burden us down and keep us from God. What does it look like to cast away the works of darkness? What would it take for us to cast all of those dark works away? We can easily get bogged down in the messiness of life, in the mire of failure, in the swamp of self-doubt, in the maze of despair, in the landmines of shame.... These are just some of the works of darkness that we are to cast away as Children of Light. What would it be like to throw them away and to turn the opposite direction and reorient our lives towards God. What things would we have to give up? What would we have to change in our lives to let

those things go? What hold does darkness have on us, who are the children of light?

In the Epistle to the Thessalonians, we hear Paul praying that God will direct the Church and make [us] “abound in love for one another and for all,” and also that Jesus may “so strengthen [all of our] hearts in holiness that [we] may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

A heart strengthened in holiness.

Do you ever pray for holiness? If something is holy, it is sacred. It is dedicated to God. Do you ever pray that you would increase in holiness? Do you hope to be more and more dedicated to God? Do you ever pray that for yourself? Jesus prayed it for us and God calls us to living holy lives each and every day.

Each Ash Wednesday, the Church invites us to the observance of a holy Lent. Today, a similar invitation is issued to us this Advent. We are invited to the observance of a Holy Advent, as a time of preparation to celebrate Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, which brings the hope of salvation to the whole earth – and to also embrace and lay claim to the promise and expectation that Jesus will come again in glory to “judge the living and the dead,” as we say weekly in the Creeds.

This Advent, as we make our hearts and our lives ready for the coming of Christ, we must remember that God is not done working in this

world and in our own lives. We know that in our world and in our own lives scary things happen: wars, natural disasters, disease, sickness, failures, and other calamities. While these things are frightening to us, Advent reminds us that they don't have the last word. If we thought God was finished, we would have no hope at all. But God's work in our lives and in creation is not over and done with. God is continuously creating the world and calling us to holiness. God in Christ acted to redeem the world and God in Christ keeps on and will keep on actively redeeming it.

That doesn't mean everything is alright now, but it means that God's faithful and loving purposes are at work in our lives. The prophet Jeremiah tells us that God "will execute justice and righteousness in the land." Here at the end of 2018, let's ask ourselves: is everything now just and right? You better believe it's not. But guess what; there is good news! God is not done working. God's faithful and loving purposes are being worked out, even when we can't see it.

Injustice and unrighteousness are an offense to God. But unless we are listening as the Church for God's call to justice and righteousness, we will miss it altogether. Listening for God's call (and not our own) in these matters is what stirs us from inertia to help change us, as God establishes a justice and righteousness in our world.

In the Gospel, Jesus is giving us assurance, not despair. The parable of the fig tree points not to doom and gloom, but rather to an optimistic and hopeful promise. Jesus is saying, 'You know winter is over when the fig tree

begins to sprout new leaves.’ He’s saying that is a sign that the time of darkness and cold and death is almost over; the time of light and warmth and new life is at hand. In other words, Jesus is saying that the signs are not bad, but good. They are not anticipating doom and destruction, but rather new life, joy, and jubilation in the justice of God’s future.

What do we do while we wait? Jesus says, “Be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down...” He’s telling us to be ready and to cast away those works of darkness that weigh us down. He’s telling us, ‘Hey, Pay attention to yourselves!’ Jesus also says “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.” This is a reminder to us to wake up, to be, as is said now “woke” at all times, looking for and identifying signs of the coming of Christ. And, as my grandfather used to say, “Be alert; the world needs more alerts.”

While we wait in the liminal space of the time when Jesus first came and when he will come again to be our judge, we have been given the task of the ministry of paying attention to our world and each other. We are called to look for the signs of Christ’s coming and to prepare our hearts and lives to be judged through Christ’s love. Today in the Eucharistic Prayer, the preface reminds us that the chief purpose of Advent is to remember God’s good news for us in that God’s beloved Son was sent to “redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.”

We are invited to the observance of a holy Advent, a time to remember the first Advent of our Redeemer and now to make our hearts, our lives, our communities, and our world ready for Christ's return. May Christ so strengthen our hearts in holiness that we may cast away the works of darkness and without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.

✠ In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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