

Advent: First Sunday

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Date: 01 December 2019

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen.

Amen. Well, happy new year to you all. Advent marks the beginning of the new church year. Isn't that great? We might find ourselves tempted to skip over the importance of Advent because the culture we live in, I've noticed, has already started the March to Christmas.

I don't want to cast too many stones on that front since I've already been listening to Christmas music myself, and I hope that the Advent police don't come after me now that I've admitted that. And yes, the Advent police do exist. They're a scary bunch. But let's, in all seriousness, not forget about Advent. Advent has a bit of a double significance, I think we'd say.

[1:22] First, in Advent, we're preparing our hearts to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. But in addition, we are preparing for the promised return of our Lord Jesus.

And Advent is a penitential season because this preparation involves repentance. It involves an honest evaluation of what we have done and what we have failed to do.

And there is a personal challenge at the heart of Advent, a question that all of us need to ask ourselves. What am I doing to prepare for Christ's return?

This year, throughout our Advent sermons, we will have a focus on the matter of stewardship.

Now, in Anglican circles, if you've been around for very long, you're inclined to think when I say that, oh no, the priest is about to talk about money. This is awkward.

[2:31] Well, stewardship does include money, but it includes more. What are we doing with all that we have been given, right? With our lives, with our time, with our gifts and our abilities?

Is it our aim to use all that we have to glorify Christ as we wait for Him to return? Or are we just going about business as usual? So, when my brother and I were kids on summer or holiday break, my mom would often leave a list of chores we were supposed to complete while she was at work. I remember as clear as day, she'd say something along the lines of, make sure this is done before I get home. There was sometimes an implied, sometimes a direct threat that if it wasn't done before she got home, things would not go well for us.

So, what would I do in that case? Well, I'd probably spend my day playing video games or riding my bike with my friends. Then I'd look at the clock, I'd see that mom would be home in about 20 minutes.

I'd take a look at my list, I'd panic and run to start the dishes. I figured that if I were at least at work on the dishes when she got home, that would count for something, right?

[3:49] What do you think? That's fair. Yeah, mom never saw it that way. I knew when she would get home. She told me what time she would be home.

But I still often miss the deadline. Now, we don't have any idea when Jesus is going to return. So, how much more should we be determined not to be caught in disobedience or idleness when he gets back?

We see that concern reflected in our readings for this morning. And it prompts us to ask ourselves this question. If Jesus were to come back today, what would he find me doing?

The first point this morning is this, just to drive this home. Jesus is certainly going to return to judge the living and the dead, and we don't know when. It could be while we are sitting here this morning. We read about the return of Christ in our gospel lesson for today. It's compared to what happened in the days of Noah when God flooded the world in judgment, and only one family, the family that was ready, survived.

[5:12] We read, But concerning that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

For as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, till the day when Noah entered the ark. And they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away.

So will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field, one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one left.

I don't know about you, but that gets my attention. What do you think? Life is going on as usual, Jesus says, and then suddenly the judgment arrives.

If that happens today, this week, this month, or before this year ends, what will you be found doing when the Lord returns?

[6:23] One thing that I knew when my mom would give me a list of things to do is that at the very least, I didn't want to be misbehaving when she got back. And for a little boy, that is easier said than done.

My brother and I were the kids who once pulled the headrests out of the seats in mom's car and she found us hitting each other with them. So, you should try it sometime.

But all that's to say, we certainly don't want to be those living in unrepentant sin and unbelief when Jesus returns. In our reading from Romans, the Apostle Paul says, The night is far gone, the day is at hand.

So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.

So Paul is warning us. You don't want to be living in drunkenness or sexual immorality when Christ comes back.

[7:35] And if we're quick to congratulate ourselves that we have those boxes checked, Paul adds quarreling and jealousy to the list. I know that this is a shock to anyone who has been a Christian for any length of time, but it's possible for believers to fall prey to quarreling and jealousy.

Ever notice that? But what do all those things as a way of life have in common, those things that Paul mentions? Well, they aren't about loving God and loving our neighbor, are they?

They're about dishonoring God and hurting our neighbor. And Paul is clear that what is done under cover of darkness will one day be revealed when the Lord returns.

And that is a startling warning. But now, right now, it's not too late to do anything about it. Now we can repent and trust in Christ.

By God's grace, we can turn from these things and find forgiveness in the name of Jesus. We can trust in Christ crucified for our sins and be cleansed by His blood.

[8:47] This warning is for those living in blatant, unrepentant sin. But there's admonitions for others, not only those in that category, in our readings for this morning.

Looking at our Gospel reading, I was struck when we read, and we went over it a second ago, for us in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark.

So, there's nothing wrong with eating and drinking. If there were, I suspect that most of us have sinned grievously this past week. Nothing wrong with marrying and giving in marriage the stuff of normal life.

But if that is all that we're doing with the time and the gifts and the resources that God has given us, we need to reevaluate what we're doing.

So, when my mom came home and caught me playing video games instead of doing my chores as I was instructed to do, it's not as if there was something inherently wrong with playing video games.

[10:02] It's that I spent the whole day doing my own thing and totally ignoring what I had been instructed to do with my time.

Jesus says, Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time?

Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. Brothers and sisters, we, as individuals, and we as a church, have a job to do.

We have neighbors to love and serve and we have a gospel to proclaim. Loving our neighbors and proclaiming the gospel. Is that what Jesus will find the people of Holy Trinity Syracuse doing?

All of us. If he returns today or this week or this year. Or are we tempted to slumber?

[11:22] Remember the warning that Jesus gives us. Jesus says, Know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore, you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. I like how our ACNA Catechism talks about how we should be preparing for the Lord's return.

Ask this question, how should you live in light of Jesus' coming return for judgment? And the answer given is this, Because I do not know when Jesus will come, I must be ready to stand before him each and every day of my life.

I should eagerly seek to make him known to others and I should encourage and support the whole church as best I can to live in readiness for his return.

Eagerly seeking to make Jesus known to others, encouraging and supporting the church, these tasks that we are given to do while we wait for the Lord's return take commitment.

[12:55] And going back to our opening theme, there are questions of stewardship involved. We aren't going to be very effective in making Christ known and encouraging and supporting the church and caring for our neighbors if we are not willing to sacrifice for it.

We'll only be effective in what we are called to do if we are willing to give of ourselves sacrificially for the Lord's service.

So, is it easier to spend our time binge-watching Netflix instead of sharing the gospel with our unbelieving friends? What do you think?

Yes, of course it is. Those BBC shows on Netflix are pretty addictive. Is it easier to sleep in on Sunday morning instead of coming to church to worship God and coming to encourage and minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ?

What do you think? Of course! And I'm saying that as someone who, when I was a younger believer, spent more mornings at St. Mattress of the Springs than I would care to admit.

[14:13] We've all been there. Is it easier to spend our money on any number of things? In my case, that would be the temptation to buy too many books instead of giving sacrificially to the work of the church and to caring for those in need?

Of course. Is it easier to spend your time taking an internet quiz to determine which breed of dog you are than to say your prayers and read your Bible?

What do you think? Of course it is! And my quiz said that I'm a Pomeranian in case you were wondering. Telling the truth.

Is it easier to go to the movies than to volunteer to help with an outreach event in the hope that we will reach someone with the gospel and they will be saved?

Of course it's easier to go to the movies. But we are called to deny ourselves and follow Jesus. And part of that means making the best use of the time, of the gifts, of the resources that he has given us.

[15:32] Particularly because we do not know how much time we have until he comes again. Advent stands as a reminder that Jesus is indeed coming again.

It is a time that's marked by hope. As believers, we know that our Lord is coming back for us. That's great. But it's also a time of repentance.

repentance. Why is that? We have done things that we ought not to have done and there is much that we should have done that we have failed to do.

Advent provides us with an opportunity. It provides us with a wake-up call. A reminder that our Lord is returning and a reminder that we are called to live in light of that reality.

If you, like me, find this morning that you have some things to confess, things you have done and things you have left undone, remember this.

[16:52] Our confession is followed by the comfortable words. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

And as forgiven sinners, we are set free. Set free from the guilt of our sins? Absolutely. But what are we set free for?

We are set free to love and serve the Lord with all that we are and all that we have. as we joyfully await his return.

We have a job to do and we need to make the most of the time that remains. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Amen. And I'm going to I'm going to and I'm going to and I'm going to and I'm going to and
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