

This Sunday's texts:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 24 36-44

**Advent Hope**

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The Holy Gospel for this First Sunday in Advent comes to us from the Gospel of Matthew, the 24th chapter:

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let that house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

The gospel of the Lord. Welcome to Advent! But there's a problem. There's a problem in Advent because we can't really decide what the color of Advent should be. Should it be purple or should it be blue? Purple is the color of penitence and blue is the color of hope. Now lest you think that Saint Timothy's hasn't been confused about this for a long time, I point to the paraments which are both purple and blue.

A few years ago, when I was at Bethel in Cupertino, there were a group of pastors around Cupertino that decided that they were going to try something new for Advent. They decided that they weren't going to fight Home Depot and they were going to just shift Advent forward by taking away some of those extra Sundays in Pentecost that really didn't seem to mean much. So they did Christ the King Sunday early and they did put the Sundays of Advent before Thanksgiving. Brilliant! Or not. But as they debated how they were going to pull this off, they were looking at the various texts assigned for the Sundays in Advent. One of the things they decided was they didn't really need two Sundays on John the Baptist,

preaching about repentance. One would be more than enough. So they decided they only needed three Sundays in Advent.

Purple is the penitential color. It's a reminder that Advent is a time of repentance. But there's an interesting problem when it comes to this question of repentance. You see, at that point in time, one of the things that were being debated in the church was whether or not it was really a good idea to have a confession *every week*. As a matter of fact, if you look at the Lutheran Book of Worship, the green books before you in the pews, one of the things you'll discover is that the brief order of confession and forgiveness is not a part of the communion service. Rather it is an *extra*. Let me rephrase. It is *optional* because they didn't want to start church with such a negative idea as repentance. Well, let me tell you something.

Repentance is not a negative idea when you know about Jesus. Repentance is not a negative idea when you know that Christ came as the Paschal Lamb, that Jesus died for our forgiveness, and that we can be covered in the blood of Christ and know that God desires and is ready and willing to forgive us when we confess our sins, that He is faithful and just and will forgive us from all unrighteousness. Repentance is actually the gift of God that leads us into the right relationship that we can have with Him, through Jesus. It is, in fact, hope that leads us to repentance because we know God's desire to forgive us in and through Jesus Christ. The Messiah came and will come again. And taking time to repent reminds us of God's incredible love and faithfulness to forgive us. So we come to repentance gladly knowing of the goodness of God. Purple is a good symbol of the hope that we have in Jesus. So this first Sunday of Advent, we look at Advent Hope.

Now the word "advent," literally in Latin, means "come into" So we remember that we are in this in-between time because Jesus actually came. The Messiah came into the world and will come again, and we're in the in-between time. So we know the promise of God has already been fulfilled in Christ and will be fulfilled again as Christ comes again. This Messiah idea is actually an idea that existed throughout Biblical times. Really, from the time of David onwards, the people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah to come and even today we wait for the Messiah to come again.

Well, I think by now most of you are aware that I am often identified as a Type A person. So waiting is not exactly what I look forward to in life.

But before I move to that idea of waiting, I want us to understand something else that was happening in the Old Testament that was a part of this

waiting. Waiting for the Messiah was not only the people of Israel but, in fact, Isaiah reminds us that the peoples were looking to Jerusalem for that same Messiah. In the Bible, there's a word "peoples." Now when I was younger, I had a really hard time with this because I was under the impression that "people" was already plural. A number of Bible readers, by the way, who would read from the lectern, when they came to "peoples" would just say "people" because you don't need an "s" to make it plural, unless you realize that the word "peoples" means people-groups. It literally is talking about different nations and nationalities and the word we have in this Old Testament lesson today wasn't a word for the people of Israel. It wasn't the people of Israel who said "He will teach us His ways that we may walk in His paths."<sup>1</sup> It was actually the peoples of the nations that said that the Lord would teach them His ways. The hope of the world was in the Messiah and we waited for it.

But I don't like to wait. As a matter of fact, I sometimes get in trouble with people, like Lunch Bunch and others, when they're feeding a bunch of people and they put a table against the wall. That means the table can only be served from one side and so the line gets longer. I want two tables that are served from both sides, so we can get through without having to wait in line. As matter of fact, you also probably know that I am a graduate of Azusa Pacific University and one of the great things about Azusa Pacific University is the way they serve food in their cafeteria. It's called the scramble system. It's really funny to watch the freshmen line up the first day in the cafeteria and all of the upperclassmen, and by upperclassmen, I mean sophomores on up, just walk right past them. It's a scramble system to get food. There are no lines. Thanks be to God! Waiting often reveals my impatience. It often brings about a feeling of frustration in me. But that is not Advent-waiting.

Advent-waiting is anticipatory. Advent-waiting is waiting in hope. Waiting, knowing that the God on whom we wait is faithful, that He fulfills His promises, that He has already come to deal with the sin of the world, and that He will come again in glory to lead us into life everlasting. We wait in hopeful expectation and anticipation.

Advent then is not simply a season of waiting. But for those of us for whom "waiting" is a curse word, we wait in anticipation. Advent is a season of anticipation, looking forward to what God will do in our life, in our world, in the

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 2:3

world's future, knowing our hope is rooted in Him. “[N]ow, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope *is* in You.”<sup>2</sup>

Now I realize that you might think I'm taking this a little bit too far, but hear me as it relates to this waiting thing. Right? Because we're in the in-between time. Jesus has come and He'll come again, so we wait. Right? Joe, did I say that right? No. There's more to it than that. Isn't there? What else is true about the promise of the Messiah? Where is Jesus, right now, while we're waiting? Come on, folks. Where is Jesus right now? He's here! He's already with us. While we anticipate this great thing that God *will* do, we live in the midst of what God is already doing. God is already present in our lives. He is already active in our lives. While there may be circumstances of challenge and circumstances of darkness, we are not left alone. God is with us, guiding us. He is indeed a light present in the midst of our darkness.

So we live with anticipatory hope, even when the circumstances of our life are challenge and difficulty because our hope is not in our circumstances. Our hope is in the Lord. Thanks be to God! The text says in Romans, “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”<sup>3</sup>

Often one of the things in our lives that will lead us into temptation is dissatisfaction. It's a feeling like we want something more that life isn't quite giving us. We look and we want more. Rather than focusing on God and what He has already done and is currently doing, we look at ourselves and we allow the selfishness, the desire to come. One of the things we talked about earlier was if we're waiting for Christmas.

Did you guys notice our youth director up here in the front? [*To Shelley:*] Would you like to stand? No, you wouldn't. She is wearing red and green. Do you know what red and green are? Christmas colors. Do you know why she does that? Because she understands that Christmas is really a pushing together of the words “Christ” and “mass” and Christmas really is the celebration of Christ's presence, His real presence for us for the forgiveness of sins. So it's okay to celebrate Christmas every day because we're celebrating the presence of Christ, who gave Himself for us.

So in the midst of the struggle in darkness, whether we're talking about the late sunrise and the early sunset, or whether we're talking about the very real struggles of life that are circumstances in these very moments might be bringing

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 39:7 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> Romans 13:12

to us, as we talk about putting on the “armor of light”<sup>4</sup> and as we talk about letting the light of Christ shine through us, I want you to either look around for the people that are here today or just look around in your mind for the people who are Saint Timothy's Lutheran Church. I want you to think about some of the folks in this church who have suffered or who are suffering. I want you to think about the light in their eyes. I want you to recognize how often it's those very people who are giving themselves away in compassion, and in caring, and in encouragement for the people that are around them. They have indeed put on the armor of light. They are indeed trusting in the light of Christ, in the midst of the darkness of circumstances because those promises are very real. So we, in this season and in every season of darkness, let the light of Christ shine, in us and through us.

I don't know about you, but there are times when I'm having a hard time when I'd really rather you didn't know it. Can anybody relate to that? But what I want to say to you is that when people know you're going through a hard time but you're asking God for strength, when people know you're going through a dark season, but they know you're leaning on Christ for light, when people know that you've been through something difficult, but now you're using that difficulty to comfort someone else in your life, that is a testimony to our Lord Jesus and His presence with us.

I often struggled with this phrase that has now come to mean something new to me that we are to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, it was going back to that repentance thing at the beginning. It was that idea that I had for when we come into judgment. I was very grateful that when I come before God and judgment, I get to clothe myself with Christ that what God is going to give to me at that moment is what Jesus deserves. Amen. Because Jesus has taken what I deserve and so to clothe myself with Christ in the presence of God and be covered by Him is an awesome gift.

But I don't think that's what this text is talking about. I think what this text is talking about is in the presence of others to clothe ourselves with Christ, two bear and bear witness to the forgiveness we have in Christ, to show forth our knowledge of the promise of God that is in Jesus for us and for others. When we put on Christ, we put on His love, His mercy. When we put on Christ, we let His light shine, even in our own darkness, so that others may join us to experience the life of Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 13:12

This Advent season may you put on Christ, His light, His strength, His promises, His encouragement, as you journey through each day. The putting on of Christ, by the way, is a daily thing. Not only because we need it every day, but because every day brings challenges that we cannot anticipate, but God knows full well.

Listen to this phrase, “God takes what the enemy meant for your bad and turns it for your good. It wasn't a setback, but a set up. Wait and see what God is getting ready to do for you.” You see, brothers and sisters in Christ, we don't just wait for eternity to start. We don't just wait for the second coming. We recognize the presence and the hope of Christ in our lives, right now. We wait to see how God is showing up in each moment of every day. We anticipate that we are not alone and that He walks with us. We anticipate, in our weakness, He is strong. We anticipate that in the darkness of our lives and our journey, His light will shine so that we can be a people of anticipatory hope so that we can be a people of hope and joy because we focus and know that our hope is in the Lord. We're going to remember in this journey that Jesus is for us this very day. Amen