

Second Chances

Holy Spirit Touch My Lips, Open Our Hearts, And Transform Our Lives.

Amen

Well it is a new season, a new year in the life of the church.

Advent, a season that is worshiped in a more solemn, quiet, less festive manor than other seasons in the church. There is no joyous Christmas music during the four weeks of advent.

Advent is a time where Christians around the world commemorate the first coming of the messiah and our ardent anticipation of Christ's second coming as Judge. Actually, the word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means "coming" or "Arrival".

Advent is a time to prepare for his coming. A time to look at our lives, a second chance to be the kind of person the lord knows we can be.

The bible stories of John the Baptist are stories of preparation and transition. John has come to "Make Straight The Path". To quote one of my favorite songs from the play Godspell "Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord".

That is actually Mark chapter 1 verse 3, but I really liked Godspell.

John the Baptist is a transition from the PROMISE of the Old Testament to the New Testament REALITY of Christ in the flesh.

In Advent each year, we remember that reality and the new promise of his second coming.

In Jeremiah, we heard God tell Jeremiah:

"I Will Fulfill The Promise I Made To The House Of Israel And The House Of Judah" we also heard that god will have "A Righteous Branch Spring Up From David"

This is the Messianic message told throughout the Old Testament, told by the Patriarchs and the Profits. The Promise of the first coming.

If we look at our New Testament reading today in Thessalonians we see, Paul's heartfelt wish for this young church and for us today that the lord:

"May strengthen our hearts in holiness that we may be blameless before God and faith at the coming of our lord Jesus with all the saints"

A new promise that if we are prepared the lord will give our hearts the strength to be blameless, to have faith, to give us another chance to be ready for his coming in judgement.



Both Jeremiah and Paul painted a very pretty picture, Luke not so much.

Luke's reading relates a rather ominous sounding prediction from Jesus. There will be signs, distress, confusion, fear, and foreboding. This sounds more like the six o'clock news or a political speech.

We are told that we will not know when he will return so we should always be ready.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth."

Nevertheless, Jesus has good news for us as well.

"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."

Luke speaks of signs and symbolism; if we look around the church today, you will see all kinds of signs and symbols of Advent.

- The purple permanents on the alter and the pulpit,
- The priest's vestments are purple, all these are signs of the penitential nature of the season and a reminder that the Christmas season has not yet arrived.
- Our Advent wreath is here with its candles.

The symbolism of the wreath and its candles are compelling;

- The ring of evergreens is without beginning or end and symbolizes Gods complete and unending love for us. The candles hold back the darkness of winter.
 - These are the darkest, shortest days of the year until Christmas when Jesus, "the light of the world" returns, and the days begin to get longer.
- Each week we light an additional candle showing the gifts that Jesus brings to the world.
 - The first candle is purple and it symbolizes Hope; the second purple candle denotes Peace. The third candle is Rose and represents Joy; the forth is Purple and stands for Love.

During my research for this sermon, I found that there were many different meanings for each candle. A more biblical version shows the path of the Messiah into the world. The first two candles represent the Patriarchs and the Prophets, the third, John the Baptist and the forth the Virgin Mary. However, in all traditions the white candle represented Jesus "The Light of the World".



All are symbols of a new beginning IN Christ.

These symbols in our church and in our worship; reminds us that God loves us. That we are his creations, and are perfectly, imperfect. I believe everyday it is God's desire for me, for all of us, to live our lives with strong hearts, full of holiness, blamelessness, and in faith.

I have been thinking a great deal of the next few months, and it dawned on me, God Willing, as a Deacon I will be that guy in the back of the church sending us out into the world saying "Go in peace to love and serve the lord". That is not just a dismissal but also our deep, deep hope that you and I will live up to God's expectation. That we are ready and will not be caught in that trap Luke mentioned.

But here is one of the wonderful parts of our worship. The next Sunday as a Deacon, I will be asking God for OUR forgiveness. Because we are not perfect, we will sin, and we need another chance.

Because God loves us so, if we repent, he forgives us...

Dear Lord,

In this Advent season, help us to prepare for your coming. Thank you for your never-ending love and forgiveness. I pray that we take this second chance to be worthy and ready.

I pray for those people in this world who think their life is unredeemable, that the lord has forgotten them. Send the Holy Spirt to let them know, God loves them and forgives them; let them know that Jesus IS the LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

That they get a second chance.

Amen

