

Sermon – First Sunday in Advent

Are You Ready?

November 29, 2020

The Rev. Randall R. Shirley

(A shorten homily to support Instructed Eucharist Service)

What a week for the Shirley Family! Thanksgiving Day has come and gone, and with both my children home from college we now have our Christmas Tree, and all our outdoor Christmas lights up at the Shirley home. It's been a week that's seen my family caught-up in Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and now eagerly awaiting tomorrow's Cyber Monday shopping deals.

For many of us, this is a time of Shopping for Presents, Decorating the Tree, Singing Christmas Carols, making Sugar Cookies and Gingerbread Houses, enjoying all the Holiday Parties, and making sure our family knows what's on our Christmas list. And for some of us, **making sure we're not on the naughty list.** Right?

But there's a lot more to this season we call Advent. In the words of Father Dave Dwyer (Busted Halo), "If you're sick of the Christmas Holidays by December 25, you haven't done Advent correctly!" You see, Advent is really a time of preparing our hearts for Jesus. Praying more deeply to draw closer to our Lord and Savior now. Advent! It's the anamnesis, the remembering of a savior coming into the world then, His work in our lives now, and our great expectation of His coming again.

Most of us are familiar with the first coming of Christ. We know of the manger in Bethlehem, the shepherds, the star, Joseph and Mary, the magi, the angels. Here at St. Michael's Church, we have a cress, a manger scene, near the altar, and we're even getting ready for our Christmas Pageant to recall all of this. Yes, we'll have a manger with live animals right here in our Church Narthex on Christmas eve! A celebration of His First Advent. But what about His Second Advent?

The Second Coming of our Lord and Savior. It will be very different. It's as important as the first coming. In fact, it's the completion of His first coming. **Sadly**, the urgency and importance of His return seems lost on so many. Too many who just ignore this great anticipated event. It's so often understated, and very rarely receives the spotlight.

**Martin Luther said**, "Live as if Jesus was Crucified Yesterday, Rose from the Dead Today, and is returning tomorrow." Let me ask you a question. What if Jesus returned tomorrow to judge the living and the dead? What would you do differently today if Jesus were to return tomorrow? It's a question, that pulls us into our gospel reading this morning. Our passage on No One Knows That Day or Hour. Please open your Bibles with me to Mark, Chapter 13, and I want to put our reading into context.

At the beginning of this Chapter, we find ourselves in the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry. In our Church Calendar we call this Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday. Jesus coming into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, the crowds singing: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" But here in Chapter 13, we find ourselves with Jesus on Tuesday of **that** Holy Week.

The Tuesday after **that** Palm Sunday, The Tuesday before **that** Friday when our Lord is Crucified. Jesus knows His hour is coming, and on this Tuesday evening, He leaves the temple grounds and heads-out of Jerusalem, and up the Mount of Olives.

Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives with His disciples, and they're looking back at the city of Jerusalem when one of His disciple's comments on the wonderful buildings. Look at what Jesus says in response to that comment at the end of Verse 2. Jesus says, "There will not be one stone left upon another – they will all be thrown down." As they all sat there in view of the Temple, the disciples then ask Jesus, in verse 4: "Tell us, WHEN will these things be?" followed by, "WHAT will be the sign WHEN all these things are about to be accomplished?" The rest of this chapter is dedicated to Jesus responding to their two-part question.

The first part concerns His death, resurrection, and ascension, whereas the second part, our gospel reading, concerns His return; His Second Coming. In answer to the first part of the question, Jesus tells His disciples that they would be witnesses to His coming to God. Witnesses of His death, resurrection and ascension. Telling them in verse 30, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Now we come to verse 32. Jesus responding to the second part of their question. "What will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"

It's a question concerning the fulfillment of God's unfolding plan to redeem all creation. It's the fulfillment that began with God coming into the world, God the Son, fully human, to suffer and die for all humanity. To sacrifice himself for sinners like you and me. That all who turn to Jesus and confess Him as Lord and Savior would not die but have ever lasting life. Jesus is telling his disciples, Jesus is telling us, to stay vigilant. Jesus stressing our responsibilities to keep the faith, our call to be on guard, and keep watch. To Stay Awake!! Because "no one knows" that day or hour. No one knows that critical moment of God's decisive intervention.

**No one knows**, not even the angels, when Christ will come again to usher in a New Heaven and a New Earth. And when He comes again, as we're told in Revelation, Chapter 21, Our Lord and Savior will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and there shall be no more death, no more sadness, no more pain. It's true: If you're sick and tired of the Christmas Holidays by December 25<sup>th</sup>, then you haven't done Advent correctly!

My Friends, let this year be an Advent truly focused on Jesus. On our Expectant Waiting, in Hopeful Anticipation, with Joyful Preparation, and of keeping ourselves Awake. An Advent of Jesus coming into our world THEN, coming into our hearts and transforming our lives NOW, and coming AGAIN to make all things new!

What would you do differently today if Jesus returns tomorrow?

Are you ready?

Are You Ready?

Father, Free us from the stressing, planning, and buying anxieties by giving us strength to keep our focus on Jesus throughout this Advent season. Grant us joy in our waiting for our Lord and Savior's return and by the Power of the Holy Spirit, convict us and move us to be ever-ready for that day. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.