



ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH IN THE CITY OF CHARLESTON
Advent One

November 28, 2021

Psalm 50:1-6

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:25-33

Preacher: Al Zadig, Jr.

I love the story about a family coming home from attending Church in Arvada, Colorado. They are in the car lamenting their worship experience. The dad from the drivers seat says, "Ya know, I don't think I've ever heard a more boring sermon in my life, it was awful!" His wife says, "and after church, no one talked to us!" Their daughter even chimes in, "And those pews were the most uncomfortable ever!" Their son, listening to it all pipes up, "Everyone relax! All four of us got in for a dollar!"

I promise they weren't talking about St. Michael's. Well, we've all been there, those Sunday mornings when everything is working against us as we try to get to church.

Our inner desires say...

- stay in bed,
- it's raining
- go next week
- or for convenience sake, just watch online.

But no, we get up, even talk our spouse into going, and then prepare battle with the kids, pulling them kicking and screaming... and 90 minutes later, you're back in the car, headed home. You didn't hear the sermon, and you wondered why you even went in the first place.

If we were to be honest, we'd have to admit, we've all had this experience, and so we push church-going into that category with other must-do things, like cleaning out the tool shed and waxing the car. I love what that English priest Nicky Gumbel says on the church...

So when I've nothing else to do I think I'll pay a visit,
So when at last I'm carried in, The Lord won't say... 'WHO IS IT?'

Which brings us to Advent!

Advent is great time for a worship reset! A series of four Sundays before Christmas, four weeks to align ourselves with God preparing for the birth of Jesus AND His second coming! We need Advent, I need Advent! I need my own reset! Our country needs a spiritual reset!

Several months ago, Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman came out with a new book called *Rediscover Church, Why the Body of Christ is Essential*. In it, they write of our need for a national spiritual reset, as they estimate that nearly 1/3 of all church goers have stopped going to church due to Covid! Some of that third are watching online, but many have just abandoned worship all together. I believe it's one of the reasons our country is increasingly divided, hostile, cynical, and violent. Advent is our reset to come back to weekly in-person worship!!

Now I know many of you watch on-line and I am sooooo grateful you do! Some of you on line are in other cities and countries like my own mother! Others of you have rightful concerns about your health. Some of you are shut ins. Again, I praise God for this technology, we will always have it! As the Wall Street Journal says, live streaming worship is the new front door of the church!

But for some, Live Stream has been just plain, well, more convenient. After all, it's a documented fact the coffee at home is much better, and your home pew, much more comfortable!

That's why I've prepared an Advent Re-Set Top 5 list of why-be-in-person for church!
Counting Down:

Number 5: You were not made to do life alone.

God made us to interact, and rub shoulders with others. When we isolate we begin to say things like, "No-one has suffered like me, no one could possibly understand my situation."

It's why C.S. Lewis said: "True Friendship is born at the moment when one says to another...What? You Too? I thought I was the only one..."

Even Jesus had twelve disciples. He physically needed believers in His life. When He was in His moment of pain, He took them to the garden to pray with Him. We need believers in our life. Church is the place to meet and support each other!

Number 4!

This is a surprise: But by being here, you actually inspire the person in the pew next to yours! You may or may not know them, but your presence gives them strength! By others seeing you in Church-- they say, okay, if it's important for them, it's important for us!

Number 3! You need church to grow.

It's very difficult to grow in isolation. Your growth as a Christian will be stunted if you don't meet with other believers. Think about a hand saying I don't need the leg! Trying to grow without rubbing shoulders with others prevents Jesus entered maturity. Iron sharpens iron! As the Bible is taught, as we come for Communion we are disciplined, we grow.

Number 2: Together and in person we can change the world!

Together and through the Holy Spirit we can transform hearts through Jesus Christ in our families, our city, state, nation, and globe. We can't make the collective impact on our own that we can make together! We are better together because together we can change the world--as we are doing and as you will hear from our Mission progress report in a bit!

In person worship

- rejects the isolation,
- inspires others,
- grows us
- and helps us make a collective impact.

But for the number one reason, drum roll please, I need to take you to Luke 21. I warn you, Luke 21 is politically and socially incorrect.

Luke 21 reveals we worship together to prepare for the end times.

The Message Bible translates Luke 21 this way: In the end times...“It will seem like all hell has broken loose, sun, moon, stars, earth and sea in an uproar, with everyone all over the world in a panic, the wind knocked out of them by the threat of doom” People will faint from the horror. Those fainting from horror are the unprepared. The ones we hear saying:

1. I can do life on my own...
2. I do it my way...
3. God is only love, there is no end of times judgement.

To their horror, these people discover they had been wrong! There was judgment! There was wrath! And instantly they became convicted of their sins, sins of omission and commission! You can hear them from a distance...God, for all the times we didn't believe you forgive us! It reminds me of the big Door on Noah's Ark going up a final time. And all those left behind yelling: “We didn't believe you Noah, forgive us!” We're then told in verse 27....THEN THE SON OF MAN WILL COME IN GREAT GLORY! Luke 21 is clear there will be that day of Judgement!

So my friends: Advent is about preparing us for that end time of judgement, AND to receive Jesus, the one birthed on earth to rescue us. So, in terms of the number one spot on our top 5 list, Luke 21 reveals we come to Church to be convicted of and confess our sins, NOT so we stay in a place of guilt, but to be here on our knees in repentance to receive Forgiveness and eternal freedom! Therefore, We come to church yes.. to be filled and receive peace, but ALSO to ask the lord to convict us of anything that separates us from Him and others!

NOW...I KNOW we can confess from home, but here we're not multi-tasking, we're not cleaning the oven and listening to church. We're in His house on our knees confessing and receiving absolution--Knowing if we died today, we are cleansed, with nothing to fear!

Advent re-set: Coming to actually be convicted of our sins in order to be aligned and liberated in Jesus!

Which brings me to Author Ray Comfort. Comfort has written several books, including: How To Make An Atheist Backslide--One of my favorites! In another, Hells Best-Kept Secret, Comfort tells the story of two men seated in a plane. A flight attendant gives the first man a parachute and instructs him to put it on because it will improve his flight. Not understanding how a parachute could possibly improve his flight, the passenger is skeptical, but because he thinks it will give him a better flight, he grudgingly wears it even though it's heavy on his shoulders.

Another flight attendant gives the second man a parachute but she tells him to put it on for a different reason. "At any moment she says, you will be jumping out of the plane at high altitude." Put on this heavy parachute to prepare. The 2nd passenger gladly straps the parachute on, and is so grateful for it he doesn't even notice the weight! The plane takes off, but the first man is saying to himself, This parachute isn't making my flight better, it's weighing me down. Disillusionment and bitterness fill his heart. The second man, because he knew what would happen to him without it, has a deep-rooted joy and peace in his heart, knowing he would be saved from sure and certain death.

My friends, confession, repentance, coming clean before God is that parachute! But it is never something to be taken negatively, but confession, true repentance and surrender like the parachute, should be worn gratefully!

Lord thank you I can repent. Thank you for the law that helps me audit my life with you and others so I can be free! It's that season we ask: "Lord, beyond the consumerism of faith, reconcile me with you and others! Change my insides Lord!

As it did for one man on October 22nd, 1944, St. Aldate's church in Oxford. I end with this. At 8pm that night, there came a man to worship for their late evening service. The man who walked in had been going to church all his life. He was baptized, confirmed, and yes, he had done all of the typical church things. He comes in, sits in his regular pew, and the preacher gets up and begins preaching. Mid-way through the sermon, something begins happening. This man becomes convicted that he had never really surrendered his whole to life to God. His heart, his money, his time, even his sins. Listen to what he writes in his journal...

"Throughout all these years, it was as if I was looking in from outside through a window into a room where people were having a party. I was outside, they were inside. I was convicted of the fact that I had never come in. And right then and there, I got on my knees and surrendered my life."

I'm talking about James Packer, a man who would transform the lives of thousands through the Gospel. A man who began living with his parachute on, not just because it made life better, but it allowed him to be ready to meet Jesus at any time!

My friends, church is not the Junior League. We're not the Gibbes museum. We are a collective rescue team, ythrough the Holy Spirit rescuing people in life and from death. If you feel like you're outside looking into faith, use Advent to reset. Come in out of isolation and rub shoulders with others. Know your presence inspires others. Know that it is here that we grow! Know that together we can make so much more of an impact than we can alone. And in the spirit of Luke 21, join your family on our knees in confession for a true Advent Reset.

Let us pray. Heavenly father, we come to you this morning, all of us needing an Advent Reset. Lord convict us of where we are drifting and re-align us confessionally with you and others. We surrender every part of our lives to you: our sins, our broken-ness, our isolation, anything that separates us from you. Help us hunger for worship that changes us from the inside out. Amen.

