

The First Sunday in Advent – 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5

Romans 13:8-14

Matthew 21:1-11

I rather like being a Christian. Someone visiting here for the first time is likely to go home and tell his wife: “Gertrude, you’ll never believe what I heard in church! The pastor said that he actually likes being a Christian. Yes, he did! I know! Totally shocked when I heard that!” Okay, so maybe that’s the most vanilla thing that you’ve ever heard from this pulpit, but it’s super true – I very much like being a Christian. It wasn’t always the case, me being a Christian. At one time I was as lost as a penguin in the Sahara. I like being a Christian because, on my own, I’m not too bright, I’m not too moral, and I’m not too deep. Some of that runs in the family. Some of it is all my own. It doesn’t stop there. On my own I’m not too loving, I’m not too virtuous, and I’m not too neighborly. That too runs in my family; the human family, of which each of you is a member. An old American proverb, attributed to Abraham Lincoln, runs like this: God must really love the common man because he made so many of them. When I was a youngster, I played with a G.I. Joe action figure. G.I. Joe was an American hero but the G.I. part stands for “general issue.” In other words, nothing fancy, just a run-of-the-mill Joe. Ordinary but heroic; that’s G.I. Joe. The figurine had a body like Adonis and a face like Brad Pitt. I’m not sure it would have sold much if it looked like a composite Lutheran guy.

Let’s not lose track of the point. If y’all missed it, here it is in bold type-face. On your own, you are not too bright, not too moral, and not too deep. It doesn’t stop there. On your own, male or female, young or old, you’re not too loving, not too virtuous, and not too neighborly. Some of it runs in your family. Some of it is all your own. Do you like being a Christian?

The bible goes to some length to tell us about those Jesus called to be apostles. Here’s a germane snippet: “Now when they (the rulers and elders of the people) saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). St. Luke writes that so that it might hit you smack in the head: Peter and John had been with Jesus (by virtue of that interaction they were simultaneously common and extraordinary). Peter and John became more than they had been previously because they had been with Jesus. A Christian is one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, who died for the sins of the world on a Roman cross and rose again on Easter. A Christian believes that our sins are forgiven by His sacrifice – we are saved by God’s grace. Our faith defines us. Christ’s righteousness defines us. The resurrection defines us. But it is also true that a Christian is one who is regularly found in Christ’s presence.

What do you suppose Jesus meant when He said: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me”? (Matthew 11:29). A yoke is a wooden crosspiece that binds two working animals together. Does Jesus want you to be bonded to Him? Why? Learn... He said that we are to learn from Him. Learn what? Learn how to love? Learn of His love for us, His fidelity and His grace, His power and His humility. Do you enjoy learning from Him? Have you learned mercy from Jesus? Have you learned how to love your neighbor? Have you learned how to pick up your cross and follow Him? Being a Christian means knowing that the crucified King, your brother, has created a new family and that He is now, and always shall be, the Head of our household.

Let's keep this really simple. Everything that I am not, the Lord Christ is. He is bright, moral, deep, loving, virtuous, and neighborly. It doesn't stop there. In fact, He is all wisdom, all truth, all holiness, all power, all giving, and all life. I want to be with Him.

Is that what the multitudes thought when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, "I want to be with Him"? "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9). Jesus of Nazareth is the Messianic Savior. He was making His way to the cross and His death. That is where the Savior was to be found. And very few of us were there; very few. The devil's instruments of hate were great in number. Those who were invited to take His yoke upon them and learn from Him were, for the most part, absent from the Place of the Skull.

Our Procession is an interesting element of the Divine Service. The first-time visitor might well think: "what in blazes are they doing?" Well, did Christ not promise to dwell with His people? (Matthew 28:20). Is He not among us as the Triumphant King? (Colossians 2:15). Crucified, Risen, and Victorious, is He not among us as One who serves (Luke 22:27). Well, that's what He said. Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). The Divine Service, where the church gathers for worship, that is where the Savior is to be found; here, present with the common man, the common woman, present to make us more.

The only way, and I mean the only way, to be prepared to receive Him when He comes on the Last Day is to be with Him now. People everywhere need to hear His Word. Apart from faith, His return will be pure judgment and a wretched end. We need to be ready. We must not be unprepared. We must not give the illusion that it will be okay to be unprepared. Jesus returns, His Second Advent, and it's over. Faith will fly to Christ as a natural expression of His love in us, His Spirit in us. Unfaith will remain cold, empty, as lost as a penguin in the Sahara. Unfaith will not enter Christ's eternal kingdom (Mark 16:16). Unfaith will not enter the Promised Land (Hebrews 3:19). Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). He ministers to you here. In love, Jesus puts His yoke around you and teaches you of Himself and you become more. That is absolutely true. It pulls at us; His love, His service, His devotion to us pulls at us. The Lord Christ prepares us for His return by coming to us now. We act wisely as we greet Him *now*, respond to Him *now*, repent *now*, receive His absolution *now*, eat His body *now*, drink His blood *now*, study His Word *now*.

Salvation is nearer now than when we first believed (Romans 13:11). That too is beautifully true. St. Paul speaks a remarkably contemporary word: "the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. The night is far gone; the day is at hand" (Romans 13:11-12). I haven't a clue when Jesus is going to return. I do know that a fool will delay preparing for the inevitable until after the inevitable has taken place. Are you a fool? It seems to be a common thing in our age, foolishness. There is so much clutter in this life/culture. How is your clutter assisting your faith? Is it possible, just possible, that the clutter in your life is the object of your unwavering attention and that sad truth makes your faith somewhat drowsy? "The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. The night is far gone; the day is at hand."

There is an urgency to Advent that isn't found as much the rest of the church year. We hear John the Baptist's voice: Prepare! Make ready! Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! I'm not too bright but when John the Baptist's voice is in my ear then I am stirred to stand vigil. God's Word does that to my soul; and yours. Christ's return is inevitable. Do you know what else is inevitable? Death is inevitable. My doctor is a good guy but He can't save me from death. My wife loves me but she, as good as she is, can't save me from a coffin and a short drive to Riverside National. I want to be with Him, that guy who was nailed to a cross and died to destroy death. I am more when I am with Him. He prepares me for my death. He, and He alone, *saves me* from death.

I love being a Christian. I love our Procession and the account of Christ's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, and preparing for Jesus' return. I am nothing more than a common man and I dwell among a common people and Lord Christ loves us with a never-ending love, a very present love, a forgiving and saving Love. His yoke is over every single one of us and we are learning. We learn what it is to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourself; we learn of Jesus. He is that love and He is with us – Immanuel, God with us. Marvel of marvels – God wants to be with us.