

First Sunday in Advent – 2024

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 19:28-40

When I was young there was a phrase that I heard a lot that I don't hear all that much anymore. Perhaps it's still as commonplace as it was back in the 60's and the 70's and I'm just not paying attention or perhaps the phrase has truly fallen out of favor – you can decide. Back in the day our parents and our teachers and others in authority would regularly say that they wanted youngsters to be “well-rounded.” Has this phrase, this sentiment gone on hiatus? I don't hear it all that much anymore. Not only that, I don't see that our approach to craft “well-rounded” young lads and young lasses is all that intentional these days. I hope that I'm not becoming a cranky old man. Alise very much hopes that I'm not becoming a cranky old man. What does it mean to be well-rounded? Being well-rounded means having a variety of skills, knowledge, and experiences across different areas, indicating a fully developed personality and a broad understanding of various subjects, rather than specializing heavily in just one field. To throw out a few examples, one should know something about the Civil War, one should be able to play blackjack, know how to throw a football, have an opinion on the Soup Nazi, have read Freud, be capable of naming a few baroque composers, be able to make a quiche, change a flat tire, and be able to say what the capital of Maine is – it's Augusta (I looked it up).

What does it mean to be a well-rounded Christian? When our Lord ascended into heaven He told the apostles to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). That sounds like Jesus wants us all to be pretty conversant with everything that He taught. Being well-rounded starts there. Knowing the OT books of the bible, the Ten Commandments, having a favorite psalm, being able to explain grace vs. works righteousness, what century Martin Luther lived in, who wrote the book of Acts, and what the word “synod” means – those are a few examples of being well-rounded. The church year helps us in our faith, helps us to become acquainted with critical aspects of Christ and His life, forging in us the rhythm of Christ's life. Minding the church year helps us to be well-rounded.

This is the season of Advent. Advent means “coming.” Advent is a cord of three strands. Weaving these three strands together will make you well rounded. The Lord has come. The Lord is coming. The Lord will come again. Put that in your brain. Let that triune statement percolate in your mind to understand what this extraordinary season is teaching us. Our Lord's First Advent was His conception and birth. Immanuel means God with us. At His First Advent, God was with us in the most marvelous way. In our flesh, in solidarity with our circumstance, with us to save us, to take our sin, to endure our punishment, to defeat death, to rise and bring us new life, God's Son is Immanuel. Our Lord's First Advent, His life lived among us, it is not a cold in history, dusty on the bookshelf, distant reality. His historic life is a living window into what He is doing now, what He is doing among us.

Jesus' Second Advent, His second coming, is something that you are to prepare for. The season of Advent focuses on that. You prepare for our Lord's return on the Last Day by receiving Him

now, by recognizing His Present Advent. The reason the season of Advent begins with our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday is to induce you to see yourselves in continuity with those people two thousand years ago who saw Jesus come into the Holy City to establish His kingdom. "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38). We aren't here to learn stale theological principles. We aren't here to delve into arcane philosophical sophistry. We are here to greet our Lord. We are here because Jesus said: "Where I am, there my servant will be also" (John 12:26). We are here because Jesus said: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). We are here because Jesus said, to His sent ones: "Whoever hears you hears me" (Luke 10:16). We, the saints of Christ the King, and those who greeted the Lord as He rode into Jerusalem, are the same congregation. Only time separates us. He enters here as the One who triumphed over sin and death, who saved us by His blood, who prepares us for His return.

Those who greet the Lord in His Present Advent will most certainly be prepared to greet Him at His Second Advent. Are you well-rounded? Isn't it a joy to know His Word? Isn't it comforting to see how the Lord Christ ministers to you, consoles you in difficulty, spurs you to love those around you irrespective of their posture toward you? A well-rounded Christian is humble, confessing their need for God's forgiveness, His grace. A well-rounded Christian is eager to serve, using the gifts that God has given them for the benefit of His kingdom, the benefit of others. A well-rounded Christian recognizes the authority of God's Word and knows that the world and its trappings are temporary, often gilded in vanity and can be a wedge between us and our faith. The season of Advent is a penitential season. We soberly confess that we have infatuations with vanity and that we have acted on those infatuations. We put other things in the place that is to be reserved for God alone. What does it mean to you that the Lord of Creation chose a manger, a feeding trough for barnyard animals, in which to lie? What lesson regarding what we are to value is to be learned?

The Lord rode into Jerusalem having just raised Lazarus from the dead. The word regarding this miracle was spreading. Everyone was asking, "Could this be the one?" The Messianic King had long been promised, could this be the one? Water into wine, lepers cleansed, the paralyzed walk, the dead are raised – could this be the one? And then this dynamic Teacher, the one who taught with such authority, was nailed to a tree. We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. What had happened? The disciples didn't know, couldn't grasp it. Easter changed that. Soon all of the disciples would be well-rounded. Fifty days after Easter, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, and the infant church was well-rounded. Pentecost blew its wind of faith into the fledgling church and the believers had the confidence of the resurrection in their hearts. That too is us. Challenges will continue to come our way. It is through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

No matter what happens to us in this world, we are a blessed people. Life is sweet in Christ's church. We know who we belong to. We know what He has done. We know the quality of the character of those who gather with us in His name. We strive to be well-rounded. Advent is preparing us to be well-rounded. We know that the Lord has come, that He is coming now, that He will come again. We greet Him, the crucified King, and we await His return. Until then, we

press on, absorbing His Word, loving those whom God sends our way, and thoroughly enjoying this season of Advent.