

Second Sunday in Advent – 2025

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 5:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

I doubt that many of y'all know who Johnny Mercer is, but he wrote a catchy tune in 1944. I'm going to quote a bit of it. "Gather 'round me, everybody. Gather 'round me, while I preach some. Feel a sermon coming on here. And the topic will be sin. And that's what I'm agin'. If you want to hear my story, Then settle back and just sit tight. While I start reviewing the attitude of doing right. You gotta ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive, e-lim-i-nate the negative, And latch on to the affirmative. Don't mess with Mr. In-Between. You got to spread joy up to the maximum. Bring gloom down to the minimum. Have faith, or pandemonium Liable to walk upon the scene" (Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive). 1944 was a different time but man is still man, Christianity is still Christianity, and John the Baptist still rattles our cage. Sin is not going to change, apathy is as real a threat as ever, and our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed (Romans 13:11).

We don't know when Christ is coming. Many are asleep, dreaming that that day is as far away from them as we are from life in ancient Shanghai. The reign of heaven is near. The King approaches and His winnowing fork is in His hand (Matthew 3:12). John isn't one to procrastinate. Faith does not procrastinate. There is urgency in Baptist's voice and that urgency is divinely constructed. The forerunner of Christ is meant to be a stimulant. People ignore him at their great peril. Peril; there's a growing segment of society that has no conception of spiritual peril. I fear for them, the crassly ignorant. But more than the crassly ignorant, I fear for those on the edges of Christ's church. When our Lord returns, He will gather the wheat into His barn but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12). There's no middle ground. John the Baptizer knows that there's no middle ground. What is the solution? Repentance. Individual repentance. Corporate repentance. Repentance is the order of the day for young and old, for rich and poor. Examine your heart. Confess your sins. Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

I'm not concerned about the militant atheist. I'm not concerned about the hedonistic criminal, the rank hypocrite, or the abjectly defiant who protest against Christ and His church. I'm concerned about those on the margins, people who are on the edges of Christianity, those who flirt with faith but who have abandoned the sanctuary of this Divine Service, who have abandoned the wheat barn of Christ's church. God, in His wisdom, will sort it out but there will be those who are in no-man's land, those who think that they are sheep and who will be sorted with the goats. Listen to our Lord: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:21-23). John's voice is to wake your spirit from slumber and turn you to the Living God, turn you toward the coming One, Christ the King. There is no one in the margins here. We are firmly in the grip of the Messianic Shepherd who has laid claim to us by His blood. We renounce flirting with the fringes of Christianity like we renounce Satan and all His works and all His ways. We want to be found in Christ when He returns.

And so we prepare. It's our soul that we prepare. It's our behavior and our attitudes that we examine. From our lives we purge what is false, what is vain and empty and futile and corrupt and selfish and prideful and worldly. We hold to His commandments. We keep ourselves sexually pure. We acknowledge our need and we come to receive His forgiveness, His righteousness in Word and Sacrament. We will make straight His paths. "There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile, he found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile; He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse, and they all live together in a little crooked house." That's me; Because of my sinful nature I'm the crooked man. And John's voice stirs me to action. The Lord Christ is coming. I am to make straight the path for Him.

John lived in a very historical reality – time and place and circumstance. Two-thousand years ago Jesus was about to begin His ministry, the most consequential time that this world has known. John prepared the way for all those people who were to receive Christ aright. But you don't live two-thousand years ago. You live now. And equally, John calls you to prepare for the arrival of Christ. His voice is lively, to the point, assertive, and perpetually contemporary. The Lord has achieved our salvation. His Work is complete. It is finished (John 19:30). And no one is saved apart from faith. Your faith must be nurtured, fed, strengthened. Christ comes to minister to us now to accomplish that very thing. It is a joy to welcome Him. It is both humbling and wonderful to receive Him, to eat His body and drink His blood, to sing His praises, to join with the faithful, the choirs of angels, to herald His glory. Now! We do this now for He will come on the Last Day and that is what we are preparing for. We enjoy Him now and as we do so we are preparing for His return.

His Word doesn't return empty but accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent (Isaiah 55). This gospel that is proclaimed here makes the crooked straight, makes you holy, brings you the power of the empty tomb and stirs us to await His return with joy. Life is fuller in His company. We can't go on sinning while we await His return with eagerness. We can't deceive others, we can't saturate ourselves with profanity, we can't pretend to be repentant while refusing to change a single thing in our crooked lives. This is what our Lord did: He left His royal throne and took up residence with us crooked men. He didn't despise us. He didn't mock our lowly status. He loved us. His love is the most wondrous sort. Holy God took up the form of a servant and died. He came knowing He would suffer the most heinous injustice. He came knowing that He would be soiled with that which is pure evil and receive in His person the just penalty for it. Love of the most wondrous sort! Selfless, holy, divine love, eternal love! He confronted death for us all. He laid Himself open to it and suffered it and was buried beneath it. God of God died on a cross with nails in His hands and feet, mocked and spit upon and deserted. Love of the most wondrous sort! That is the God we prepare for. Forgiveness flows from His wounds. Heaven flows from His wounds. Love flows from His wounds. Prepare for *Him*! Bear fruit for *Him*! Show the world that He is your Savior – forgive others, have mercy on others, uplift others, serve others, speak the gospel to others.

Walker Hall is wheat in the barn. The Lord has baptized Walker with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). Sophia Louise and Wyatt Robert will ensure that this young lad's faith is nurtured and he will grow strong. Pentecost has come today for Walker Hall. The glory of the Lord invaded His soul and Christ's righteousness washed Him. Walker is prepared to receive the

King when He comes. This holy house is the predecessor of Christ's heavenly barn. The wheat is in the barn. We are prepared. The death and resurrection of the Son of God defines this place and we are prepared. We receive His gifts in faith and we look for His return. Today salvation has come to this house (Luke 19:9). We ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive, e-lim-i-nate the negative and don't mess with Mr. In-Between. The Lord is coming. We will prepare.