

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

First Sunday of Advent

Year C

RCL



Jeremiah 33:14-16

Psalms 25:1-9

Luke 21:25-36

The Collect

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Psalm 25:1-9 Page 614, BCP

Ad te, Domine, levavi

- 1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
my God, I put my trust in you;
let me not be humiliated,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame;
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
- 3 Show me your ways, O LORD,
and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
in you have I trusted all the day long.
- 5 Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your love
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the LORD;
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
- 8 He guides the humble in doing right
and teaches his way to the lowly.
- 9 All the paths of the LORD are love and faithfulness
to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 21:25-36

Jesus said, “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell

you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

SERMON

And so we begin a new church year with the first Sunday in Advent and the unfolding of all our well loved holiday traditions. Those traditions are passed down from generation to generation, and we are very protective of them. Since we were taught that the way we used to do things was the right way to do things, we tend to think that any change must be in the wrong direction. It's what makes us cranky.

Of course, if we want to be honest about it, a lot of the things we once believed to be important were, in hindsight, pretty loopy. For instance, I was required to endure two years of Latin under the none-too-welcoming tutelage of Ms. Phillips. That's why I can tell you that Advent comes from the Latin, *venio, venis, venit, venimus, venitus, veniunt* meaning "to come". Our education was deemed incomplete until we could demon-

strate at least some facility in a language spoken today only in the Vatican, and that only rarely. Loopy!

We had to study Latin, we were told, because so many English words were derived from Latin. The less credulous among us might have pointed out that a cheap copy of Webster's Dictionary would allow us to understand English words without knowing anything at all about Latin, but we children weren't asked about things like that. You and I might suspect that there was something else powering the perceived need to bore children beyond endurance studying a dead language, and we'd be right. We were made to study Latin because that's the way it had always been done, and nobody gave much thought about it, or wanted the grief involved in trying to change it. It was a tradition, and boy! Do we love traditions!

A young bride was preparing her first roast for her

new husband. She began by cutting off the end of the roast. “Why did you do that?” the new husband asked.

“I don’t know”, she replied. “My mother always did that.” The next time she saw her mother, though, she remembered the question and asked her.

“I don’t know”, mom replied. “My mother always did that.”

Now it was a mystery, and Grandma was consulted. “Why did you always cut the end off the roast?”

“Pan was too short”, she said.

Following traditions makes us feel placed and safe within them. They are the space within which we live, but if the reasons for the traditions are lost sight of, they become nothing more than idols – we worship our preferences for the way we do things. We can’t let that happen with Advent. And yet, we do just that. The Christmas season is such a big deal that when I was a child,

my Jewish neighbors, who couldn't very well have had a Christmas tree, had a "Chanukkah Bush" instead. We overlook the importance of Advent as its own sacred space as we get involved in our Thanksgiving and Christmas preparations. We can't view Advent as the time we prepare for Christmas gift-giving without losing sight of the real meaning of Christmas (and forgive me for using a phrase that has been kicked around so much that it has had all the stuffing kicked out of it).

In the church's understanding, we focus on two things during Advent: a celebration of the birth of our Lord, certainly, but also we are called to prepare ourselves for His second coming. Historically, Advent is a time of repentance and reflection in preparation for the coming of the Lord, but we get all Jingle Bells and holly and overlook that second point. Before we get all tied up in the holiday shopping, I want us to focus in on that

question: “Why are repentance and reflection our proper response to His birth? Shouldn't we throw on the glad rags and par-tay?” No, we shouldn't. This is serious. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. What will He find?

Luke tells us in his prologue that he wants to pass on the truth which has come to him in his research. He isn't looking for confirmation of what he always thought, and he isn't celebrating his own traditions. He is at great pains to indicate that something is going to happen which will fulfill the Scriptures.

Jesus said, “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.

Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

I think this is the message which Luke is trying to share – something's coming and it isn't what you expected, but it is something to be welcomed. Your redemption is at hand. It is up to us to be worthily prepared by clearing the decks of our preference to worship our own expectations and traditions. When we worship our traditions as idols, we look forward to the end times as confirming our good opinion of ourselves. Luke is telling us to guard against such a thing for it is truly heretical. Indeed, it can be argued with some success that the story of Jesus' time on earth told by the Gospels in large part consists of His treading on tradition to bring about the new covenant.

I'm not seriously arguing that there's anything in-

herently wrong with jingle bells and holly, and I'm certainly not proposing that we give up our family time, and the joys of Christmas giving. I am suggesting that beneath it all is coming change and that the discipline of claiming the name Christian says that we must undertake serious preparations for it.

So the coming of Advent brings with it conflict – conflict between the traditions which define the space within which we live and which give us a sense of comfort and safety, and the change that is coming as we welcome the Son of Man coming in a cloud. Indeed, we could even say that the cloud represents our confusion over where our loyalties lie and not be far from the truth. The historic understanding of the church which characterizes Advent as a time of reflection and repentance is intended to help us focus on that vital duty.

“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

I cannot think of a single thing to add to that.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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