

Good morning! Today is the first Sunday in Advent: the beginning of a new church year.

When I was young, Advent simply meant “Christmas is coming.” Every year on Thanksgiving Day, my Great Aunt Susan, would give me and my siblings an Advent calendar. It was the highlight of Thanksgiving Day for us. We’d set it up in the same place every year – on the north facing windowsill in our dining room. Anticipation built to a crescendo as we approached the best day of all – the day of the double doors – December 24th. December 24th always had the BEST picture – usually a creche scene, complete with a beautiful glittery star. When those doors were opened, we knew it was Christmas. Advent was, for us, a time of **anticipation, expectation, and wonder**. That is the Advent time of our childhood memories:

that time of Advent Calendars, and being good because Santa was watching.

BUT Advent is more than simply a “countdown to Christmas.”

There’s a 2nd face of Advent that happens as our faith matures. We may perceive it to be a liminal time where we wait with anticipation for something that we KNOW to be coming, but for that which has not yet arrived. And, spoiler alert, it’s not about finding out what’s in those wrapped packages under the tree. It’s when we begin to sense, really sense, that God is vying for our attention: when we begin to NOTICE the “Everyday Sacred” that is always encircling us; the Holy Spirit begging us to wake up and take notice. I liken it to a feeling that someone or something is BANGING at the doors of our hearts, waving its arms frantically and yelling: “Hey, WAKE UP! I’m here.”

There is something about our God (our TRINITY) that begs us to wake up; to notice the world around us. I sense it often in the light of the early morning, when I walk my dog out at Linn Nature Park. I revel in it when the leaves all turn golden on a fall day. And, just the other day, I experienced it when an old friend picked me up to take me to a doctor’s visit, just to take notes, as a second set of ears. That’s where I experience God. THAT’S the second face of Advent: **Where do you experience Christ today – in the here and now?**

The good Episcopal answer (of course) is that we anticipate and feel the presence of Christ in the Word and Sacraments – and I hope we all do – but if we limit our search to just Sunday mornings, we’ll miss *so many other opportunities* to experience God’s grace and love. This season calls us to wake up – to look around – and to *expect* to find Christ in the “here and now.” Advent People are aware; awake; ALWAYS anticipating the unexpected when grocery shopping, while taking a walk, or while ringing the bells at the Pig – because God is *Omnipresent, always present*, seeking us out, inviting us in, and asking for our help. Do we notice? Are we awake? **Where do you experience God in the everyday?**

And finally, there is a third face of Advent.

This one is the one we traditionally have the most difficulty with.

So, here's a quiz. Fill in this blank:

"Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will _____. ("Christ will come again.")

Advent promises us that this statement is true.

Notice it doesn't say "Christ *might* come again." **Christ WILL come again.**

That's the third face of Advent: the UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH that Christ *will* come again.

This is the Advent described in our readings today: The Final Coming.

My systematic theology professor always called Advent a "mini-Lent:" a time to prepare, a time to anticipate, a time to repent. This 3rd *face of Advent* is that time where Isaiah reminds us that "*Nations will no longer lift up swords against nations.*" And, in the Gospel Jesus says, "about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father," but to be ready, "for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour." That third face of Advent, invites us to LIVE as if we truly believe that Christ is REALLY coming back – AND SOON! When we come to believe THAT, suddenly we want details! When's it going to happen? What's He going to look like? And what shape are we in if he were to return TOMORROW?

But let's set aside our obsessions about *WHEN* or what's going to HAPPEN when he comes again. *Because even Jesus didn't know.* The MOST important thing for us, indeed the whole message of Advent, is to *prepare; to be ready!*

So for the next four weeks, we will keep asking ourselves: "Are we awake?"

How are we with God and with each other?

Are we making the most of our time here, serving the poor, the sick, and the lonely?

Are we really respecting the dignity of every human being?

This week I saw a meme that pictured a Skateboarder standing at the gates of heaven in front of St. Peter. It read:

*"Life is **not** about a safe arrival. Life is about arriving at the pearly gates on a skateboard, skidding to a stop in front of St. Peter and saying, "Whoo-eee, baby, what a ride!"*

I smiled because, in its humor, I realized this is what Christ calls us to be. Christ calls us *to take risks*, even when we feel as though we haven't got an ounce of courage left. Christ *invites* us to bind up our old wounds and to join him in his ministry of wholeness and healing.

In other words, **Advent People prepare for Christ's second coming by living the lives we've been given and living them ABUNDANTLY.**

NOWHERE, *NOWHERE*, does scripture or Jesus tell us to hole up in bunkers and wait idly by until a comet passes overhead to carry us up to heaven. The time is now!

Now is the time to become people of Light.

Now is the time to seek peace and to pursue it.

Now is the time to rekindle the fire in our hearts.

Now is the time to love one another.

Our **VOCATION** is to watch for the signs of God's presence, especially as revealed in healing the sick, standing with the suffering, bringing sight to the blind and encouragement to the lonely. This is where we go to see what God is doing.

As we come together as partners in ministry on this first day of a brand-new year, and as we decorate our homes with the lights of Christmas, let us view each twinkling light as a simple message whispering to us, ***"Christ will come again."***

And let us greet him as Advent People:

People of the light, and Keepers of the flame. Amen.