

Sermon for Advent 1C  
Sunday, November 28, 2021  
“Prepare yourselves to prepare the way!”

Text: Luke 21:25-36

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The first thing I'd like to say this morning is “Happy New Year!” Happy new liturgical year, that is. The season of Advent begins a new liturgical year. We begin Year C in our lectionary, so our Gospel readings will come from the Gospel according to St. Luke. In the daily office of Morning and Evening Prayer we begin Year 2 today. Advent is also our season of waiting and expectation, which is why the altar is pushed against the wall for the next four Sundays, so that we can all face east, including the priest, as we await the Dawn from on high to come upon us.

Advent is the season that prepares us for the Christmas season. No, not the commercial season; that started weeks ago in stores and “officially” with the arrival of Santa Claus at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade this past Thursday. The Christmas season I'm talking about is the liturgical season that begins with the Solemnity of the Nativity, or Christmas Day, and lasts for twelve days. It recalls the time long ago when God became man. Advent gets us ready for that by retelling the stories of the Annunciation of the coming Messiah to Mary by the archangel Gabriel, and the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah whose purpose was to prepare the way. Advent is also the season that prepares us in our modern time for the return of the Messiah, which we are currently awaiting. But what seems strange is that Advent tells these stories in reverse order. It begins with Jesus foretelling his death and return, which we heard in today's Gospel. Then we hear about the coming of the forerunner; then we recall the Annunciation. It's like the end precedes the beginning, but that's intentional, because it's meant to help us understand that the story of the first coming always unfolds with the second coming in sight.

The problem with Advent is that it is countercultural. In today's world, we thrive on immediate gratification. We're used to getting information instantly via the internet. We're constantly getting breaking news updates as a popup on our cell phones. We can talk to whomever we want any time we want by phone or by text. We send live updates of our lives on Facebook. As soon as we want to share information, we pick up the phone and we call our best friend to tell them all about what's on our mind. We can shop any day of the week. We can eat any kind of fruit and vegetable we want, regardless of their natural season; we eat strawberries in December and pumpkins in July. We don't even need to wait to see our loved ones; we don't need to save up money until we can travel to see them, we can just FaceTime them or see them on Zoom. We want everything right now. We can travel to any continent within 24 hours. Our world is fast paced, hurried, nervous, and impatient. We hate to wait, so the season of Advent doesn't fit into our daily lives. Waiting for Christmas doesn't fit into our daily lives. Stores have been decorated for Christmas for a few weeks at least. We hear Christmas

music everywhere we go. Waiting and anticipating are activities that we just don't like to do. The last year and a half has forced us to wait—wait to get together with friends and loved ones, wait to travel, wait to do the things we enjoy doing. That's why Advent is so incredibly important. Advent allows us to slow down, step back, and prepare ourselves. Advent helps us to prepare the way of the Lord.

Amid the frenzy of our time, we also live with angst, we live in fear. Fear of our enemies, fear of violence, fear of those who are different, fear of health issues, fear of lack of resources, fear of having lost loved ones. Worse still, people and politicians help fuel our fears with their rhetoric that stokes the fires of our fears at the very heart and raise our anxiety and our angst. Not very different from Jesus' own time.

Today's gospel troubles us because it sounds too much like our own time. It makes us think that the end might be just around the corner—of course, we know neither the day nor the hour. Am I ready if it *is* the end? The answer for most of us is probably, "No." We don't want the end to happen and we're not ready. We want to have our spiritual house in order. Do you have your spiritual house in order? Are you in good relationship with yourself, with others around you, with God? The lesson tells us to be prepared. The thing about being reminded about the end times, the eschaton—just a fancy word for the end times—the thing about this lesson reminding us of the end times is that it reveals to us the reality of our state of being. This lesson reveals the already and not yet. We know the story of Jesus' coming into the world—the already—and we relive the anticipation of that by observing Advent, but we are also waiting for him to come again—the not yet. The world was broken two thousand years ago, and it is still broken. They needed a savior then, and we need a savior now.

But the good news about today's Gospel is that in the midst of all of the frenzy and all of the fear, God is still there, and we have the coming of Jesus, two thousand years ago and his expected return, to tell us that everything will be ok. Jesus promised never to abandon us, even in the midst of the troubles of the world; he promised to strengthen and encourage us, to equip us, not only to endure the challenges that we are facing, but to enable us to flourish. God became human and lived as one of us, experienced joy and sorrow, good health and pain, even death. Fear and hardship will never completely go away, but Jesus's having come and his anticipated return give us courage to be faithful and loving people. That means that until he does return, we have work to do in the world being Jesus's disciples in the world to bring this message of courage and to demonstrate how to live with of strength and courage in the midst of fearful, anxiety-provoking things. As his disciples, we can engage in the work of compassion for those who are hurting, encouragement to those who are afraid, solidarity with those who are oppressed, resistance to evil, forgiveness for those who have wronged us, and acceptance of all of God's people. And we can go forth in confidence because even if our actions don't change the world, even if what we do

changes only one life, we know that Christ's resurrection has already changed the world. We can put our trust in what Jesus Christ has already done.

So we don't need to live with the angst of our time, we need to prepare ourselves, to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light to go forth into the world and tell the good news that Jesus is coming. We can be the John the Baptists of the present age, inviting all whom we meet to prepare the way of the coming Lord. Amen.

### Resources

David Lose, "...In the Meantime," <http://www.davidlose.net/2018/11/advent-1-c-courage/>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-of-advent-3/commentary-on-luke-2125-36-5>