

Advent 1, 2017

Preparation and Response

Matthew 21: 1-13

St. Andrew's – Jacksonville, OR

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Beep-beep-beep! “This is a test of the emergency broadcasting system. If this had been an actual emergency, the Attention Signal you just heard would have been followed by official information, news, or instructions. This concludes this test of the emergency broadcast system.”
Preparation and response...are you ready? If so, what are you ready for?

We live in a world today where information is readily at our fingertips. Much of that information is telling us that we are likely to be struck by some kind of devastation. Mass shootings on the rise, natural disasters taking more lives in this century than ever before, cyber crimes ready to drain our bank accounts and threats of a nuclear devastation resting at our doorsteps. We are becoming a nation bent on preparedness; preparing for any situation or catastrophe that could possibly come our way...not matter how remote or how possible. It is common today to hear of people stockpiling weapons for protection, gold and currency to last out “come what may”, and food storage to get us through when the time comes...because we are sure THE TIME WILL COME!

The reality is...that the time will come and no amount of preparation will prevent our final dismissal from this earth...we are not immortal...at least not yet. While the afore mentioned possibilities are legitimate concerns and we should think ahead and plan accordingly, are we truly prepared for the ultimate encounter...when we meet Jesus face to face?

As we enter the Advent season we are drawn to a biblical narrative that compels us to ensure our preparedness, to respond to the call of Jesus Christ. Advent is about looking to last things...end times, even our own finality. Jesus came into this world with a warning...sin has separated us from God and we risk the loss of eternal life if we are not properly prepared. Today's Gospel reading is all about the triumphal entrance of

Jesus Christ into the heart of Jerusalem...where, as recorded in Luke's Gospel, he will stop and weep because of the unpreparedness of his people. Hear the words of Jesus Christ as he crested that final hill, rounded that final bend and beheld Jerusalem...the heart of mankind;

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Can you see the importance of Advent? In the words of John the Baptist, *"Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"* The Lord has come and he came with a warning, and the Lord will come again...have you prepared a place in your heart for His triumphal entry? Or is Jesus weeping at your door...knock, knock, knock...this is a test...of your faith...will you respond?

Between the birth of Jesus Christ and his ultimate resurrection we witness his entrance into Jerusalem as a warning of birthing pangs. The physical journey of Jesus amongst us is now a spiritual journey of Christ within us. We too are being prepared as babes in Christ, who after drinking the spiritual milk of God's Word, are called to respond to the meatier depths of our calling that we too may experience the resurrection joy at our last day. Have we heeded the warnings!?

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." Matthew 24:32

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come." Mark 13:33

"Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit." Luke 12:35

And that, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed."
Romans 13:11

So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.”

1 Thessalonians 5:6

What will you respond to? What will it take to get your attention? The beep...beep...beep? The knock...knock...knock? The former may save you for the day, but it is the latter...and the latter only that has the power of eternal life. Advent is a time of new commitment...a time of renewal...a time to make the decision to grow deeper. It is a new start. So, how do we prepare...how do we answer the call? Hebrews chapter 10 tells us the answer, *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Hebrews 10:24-25). Gathering together in worship is our intimate calling whereby we hold each other up, where the gifts of the spirit are recognized and put into motion. The day is approaching and as members of the body of Christ we are to strengthen each other...offering our gifts to the service of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Preparedness is in our blood. Time moves ever forward forcing us to make alterations in our lives so that we may be better equipped for what lies ahead. Time (waiting on the Lord) and preparation are ever entwined and are tools used by God to bring mankind back to himself. Time and preparation come together in mankind to reveal an expectation...for those in Christ this expectation is eternal life with the Almighty. But time is a cruel master...sin has infested the creation and now all things go from order to disorder and even death.

Go ahead and prepare for the big storm, but don't let the beep...beep...beep sound louder than the knock...knock...knock. Jesus stands ready this Advent season to welcome you home with open arms. The feast is prepared, a seat is offered...come to the Table, for your salvation is nearer than when you first began.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.