

Sunday, December 3, 2017 – 1st Sunday of Advent
“Preparations”

Mark 13: 24-37

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Text/Application

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

A little boy walks up to a clerk at the grocery store and says, “Hey, mister. Do you have any Advent?” The clerk pauses for a moment, then answers, “I don’t think so – what is it?” The boy replies, “I don’t know, but my mom says we can’t have Christmas till we have Advent.”

Do you ever feel that way about Advent? You’re not really sure what it is, but you have to have it before you get to Christmas. Christmas is being celebrated just about everywhere right now – except in here. Everywhere else we hear Christmas music – in here we’re still singing Advent hymns. In fact, not only are we not singing Christmas hymns yet, we’re talking about the end of the world. “What?!”

Yeah, Advent is confusing. Why do we have such dark and foreboding Scripture passages today? Who wants to listen to that, with so much Christmas going on?

Well, the major theme of Advent is preparation. Advent just means “Come.” The arrival of God who comes into our world requires preparation. And Advent is designed as a time to pause in our busy lives and get ready. But the thought crosses my mind, “Is that preparation thing really so necessary in this day and age?” Well, let’s look at another time that Jesus arrived.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday crowds shouted out, “Blessed is [the King] who comes in the name of the Lord!” The people were right; the King had arrived. But, they were really not prepared. They were not prepared for this kind of King. He was a King with servant clothes on. He arrived in humility and did not look like the King of Kings.

Of course, the reason for this was that Jesus was a King who had yet to be obedient unto death. He had yet to wear the crown of thorns, and be nailed to a cross so our sins could be forgiven.

And this the people were not prepared for. In the busyness of their lives they were looking for Jesus to provide for them help in the things that were really important – How to get

free of political oppression. How to get the right people in government. Job security. Financial peace of mind. These are the things that mattered.

It was Passover time. Crowds filled Jerusalem. And even though, Jesus had spent many hours teaching, instructing, and almost continuously confronting the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees – about who He was and why He was here – the people heard only what they wanted to hear. The arrival of God in human flesh was being overlooked, missed, because of personal agendas and misplaced priorities. Jesus' attempts to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming events of the cross, and ultimately the coming events of the end of the world – were being twisted around in their minds – from the adoring crowds to the most hateful enemies – even Jesus' own disciples. The result was that they saw Jesus as principally, a provider of felt needs.

Then in verse 3 of this chapter, a page or so before our Gospel text begins, Jesus and His disciples withdraw to the relative peace and quiet of the Mount of Olives. From there they have a full view of the city and the temple. And while the disciples were taking in the view, Jesus uses this setting to speak about the last things. He wants to prepare them, to help them understand that life would be difficult, but that through faith, they would prevail. He was preparing disciples for the next few days – the climax of His earthly mission – the events of His betrayal, suffering, and death. But they weren't listening. They were hearing, but they weren't listening. They were dreaming too much about their earthly kingdom and their role in it, the prestige and honor they wanted, their goals. If they had slowed down, and listened, really listened, to what Jesus was actually saying, they would have detected the spiritual dimension of what Jesus was talking about, that things were going to be very different than they were expecting. But satan is clever. He knows the value of busy. He knows that the busier human beings become, the more unspiritual they tend to become. And so, satan kept the Holy Week pace of events at a fever pitch. A frantic pace of life, usually means that people are too focused on themselves and the things they have to do, and generally not on God and spiritual preparation. And so, they were hearing, but they weren't listening. And so they ended up shocked and ill-prepared for the events that began three nights later when Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and crucified.

Sound familiar? Jesus wants to prepare us for His arrival, His time spent here – in our hearts and lives, and for the conclusion of all earthly things. Are we listening? Or, are we operating with false expectations and understandings that hinder our preparation? Are we dreaming too much of worldly goals, and wishes, and not listening to Jesus?

In this Advent and approaching Christmas season, satan has had the most success in creating such a feverish season that few people are able to pause, nor do they want to hear the gentle voice of Jesus in the text – encouraging us how to prepare our hearts for Christian life in this dying world.

As we continue in this Advent season, yeah we're getting ready to celebrate the first coming of God's Son at Christmas. But, we must see also His second and final Advent, when He comes, not as a King dressed as a servant in swaddling clothes, and later riding on a donkey, but as "the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." We need to pause, so that we can hear, not only Jesus' warning to be prepared, but His instruction on how we are prepared.

Parents, I know many of you dream about the small things. Like being able to tell your children to go take a bath, and have them accomplish it efficiently and quickly. Maybe for you, it's still a dream, and reality is that you have to tell them to wash themselves after they get in the water – use soap. Wet your hair. No goofing off! Then you check on them to find that they haven't washed. And while the floor and the wall are now soaked, their hair and the soap are still dry. You warn, "I'm coming back soon." And if, in that time, they have not washed and got themselves ready for bed, judgment will descend upon them, and they will think that the stars are falling from the sky.

Too often we think this is how we must prepare for when Jesus comes back. We think we must do the right things. We must accomplish the expected tasks. And if we don't... Look out! God is going to get us. But, the Advent message of preparation is not that we have to do this or that, or act a certain way. It's really just a call to pause and listen. And that is why I like Advent. As someone who thrives on, absolutely needs quiet but so easily gets distracted by busyness, yes, especially now, I need Advent.

We really do need a little Advent before Christmas. We really do need to think beyond just this Christmastime and see the bigger picture. And in so doing, we will hear Jesus. And we will find that we are prepared. We will discover that God's grace has prepared us – and is preparing us.

The grace of God prepares us when our hearts are focused upon our Savior, Jesus. The grace of God prepares us when He reminds us that the center of Christmas is Jesus. The grace of God prepares us for eternity when He pinpoints our lives in the redeeming cross of Jesus – where we live in ongoing repentance and forgiveness. The grace of God prepares us when we understand that, even though we may suffer many things, Jesus has won victory for us. The grace of God prepares us when, because of the resurrection of Jesus, we know eternal life has begun for us, and that Jesus' second coming is simply a continuation of something we already have.

Friends, Advent preparation is not complicated, but it can be hard – because it might require change. We prepare by listening to Jesus. Listening and believing. And if, in finding the time to listen, that means slowing down the pace and activities of life, then may God grant us the grace to do just that.

In Jesus' name, Amen.