



"Celebrate Messiah: Plan diligently"

First Sunday of Advent
8:15 and 11:00 a.m. Sunday, November 27, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

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

When I was growing up, I was one of those standard Central Pennsylvania kids. As soon as I was old enough, my father signed me up for the football team. So, I was playing football since I was eight years old. What I really remember about it were the practices. We would go all the way into the evening. They even would have to turn the lights so we could finish practice. I remember, in particular, all of the drills that we had to do, and most of them centered around two very basic things. As you know, blocking and tackling are fundamental to football, and so I remember doing all sorts of drills in the course of the practice working on blocking and tackling. Over, and over, and over and over again, we would spend a significant amount of the practice time just working on those basics. Breaking down those actions of blocking someone or tackling someone to the simplest of forms so that we would get muscle memory, to use when we were finally in the game. That's why you practice over, and over, and over again. The drills we did were to help us prepare ultimately for the game that we were going to play, but we also knew that the game was there to help us prepare for life. With the planning and the practice, we knew that it would lead to better results.

A famous football coach for the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, said this; *"The will to win is not nearly important as the will to prepare to win."*

What I love about doing baptisms especially baptisms with adults, and we have been really blessed here at Trinity to be able to connect with a number of people who are exploring their faith and who as adults have come to us seeking out the sacrament of Holy Baptism, is the time to spend one on one with them. We found that the best resource that we could possibly use in doing preparation for Holy Baptism is Martin Luther's Large Catechism. It takes the Christian through all of the basics of the faith. What is the law in the Ten Commandments? What is prayer in the Lord's Prayer? What is the Sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion? What are the basic core beliefs represented in the Apostle's Creed? The Catechism is nothing less than baptismal preparation, baptismal training for all of us because it is for us an entry into the new life that is offered to us by Jesus Christ. So, it is important for all of us, if it's been a while since you read the Small or the Large Catechism I invite you to do that, especially this year as we prepare to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

The reason that we prepare is because we know that in baptism we are offered new life by Jesus Christ and that the old order is ending and a new era is beginning. In other words, judgment is coming, brothers and sisters. Now we don't know when that's going to be, we don't know the time or the hour, but it will surely come when Christ comes

again and Jesus shares with his disciples that idea. He says that in the days of Noah, in the same way that judgment came to the people at the time of Noah, in Jesus' final return there will be a judgment, there will be a final judgment. And this judgment is going to be universal. It's going to affect everyone. As I said, we don't know when it's coming, but it will be for everyone, not just for a few chosen believers.

If you notice what Jesus talks about in the end is coming, people are just going about, well the regular business of life. Some are working in the fields, some are changing the oil in their cars, vacuuming the living room, walking the dog, or maybe throwing the football with their kids in the back yard. When the end comes, people will just be living life. As Jesus says, "one will be ready and one will not."

So, Jesus says to us, be ready, plan, prepare diligently, stay alert, live life like you are ready for Jesus to return at any moment. And so, are you treating people with respect and honesty? Are you living with integrity? Are you fostering unity and harmony? Are you loving and serving God with all of your heart and soul and mind? How will you live your life? So, you and I have a choice. Jesus invites us to plan, to prepare, and to keep awake. What he doesn't want us to do is to sleepwalk through life. We are to notice what's happening around us, because our actions have consequences. The unkind word, the mean spiritedness, that not noticing the needs of your neighbor. These have consequences.

And so, Jesus says to all of us, keep awake. Understand and know it matters what you do and don't do? What you say and don't say? Because after all, brothers and sisters, it is a dangerous and perilous world out there and the gods of this world, and there are many, pride, ego, greed, consumerism, and others, are trying to craft their own message to gain their attention over you. And so, Jesus is telling us that we need spiritual strategies to maneuver through life.

The Apostle Paul in Romans puts it this way, he says to all of us, "*Put on the armor of light*" and that light is none other than the light of Christ. It doesn't just happen, no, we make a choice. It's like training for a marathon, if you haven't gone out and run a little bit you are not going to enjoy the experience, or joining the army without even thinking about what the consequences of that might mean for you, or becoming a leader in whatever your own field of study or work is, it's not just going to happen for you. Unfortunately, we cannot be like that Holiday Inn Express commercial where the guy is doing surgery and then he pulls down his mask and the nurse says, "Wait a second, you're not Dr. Johnson," and then the guy says, "Well, I am not a doctor, but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express."

You and I are called to plan diligently to receive Jesus into our life and the world. Because God is at work in our world and too often we are blind to see the movements of the Spirit. Too often we want to close our eyes as to how God might be trying to teach his church how to engage the world in a new way. But Advent, Advent is a time to awaken our spirits to God's holy presence. For us to plan diligently for the unexpected created Holy One, to touch our life in a new and awesome way, and so we celebrate our Messiah who comes to bring us life, true life.

*"Our hope and our expectation, O Jesus, now appear!
Arise, O Son so longed for, over this benighted sphere!
With hearts and hands uplifted, we plead, O Lord, to see*

The day of earth's redemption that sets your people free."

Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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