

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

Judgement!

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Luke 21:26–27 (ESV)

Judgement!

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Judgement!

Are you fainting with fear, are you distracted and trapped, or are you waiting with joyful anticipation for your redemption drawing near?

We pray, Lord, sanctify us with the truth; your word is truth, and may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

US country artist Kenny Chesney sings in his song; Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven:

“Preacher told me last Sunday mornin’
Son, you better start livin’ right
You need to quit the women and whiskey
And carrying on all night

Don’t you wanna hear him call your name
When you’re standin’ at the pearly gates?
I told the preacher, Yes I do
But I hope he don’t call today
I ain’t ready

Everybody wants to go to heaven
Have a mansion high above the clouds
Everybody wants to go to heaven
But nobody wants to go now”

There are three main issues with the attitude displayed in this song. The first is that faithful Christians are always ready for their Lord and Saviour to return, so we boldly pray, come Lord Jesus! Second is the thinking that when we are ready, we can switch on salvation like a light switch; that is, we don’t need to live faithful lives, but we can just be ‘good enough’ when we die. The third issue is that the preacher seems to think that good behaviour is the only requisite for heaven. But that’s not what Jesus tells us in our reading, and it is an excellent reminder for us to reclaim Advent for its intended purpose.

Here is what the LCA worship resources say about Advent.

The word 'advent' means 'coming'. During this time we look forward to our Lord's coming as a human baby at Bethlehem and also to his final coming as king at the end of time. We also remember his continual coming to his people in his word and sacraments. Advent is, therefore, a time of waiting, preparing, and hoping. This involves both repentance and joyful anticipation.

Although this emphasis has largely been lost in recent times, Advent is a penitential season of the church.

Advent is a Penitential season of the Church. It is a time of considering our sins and specific sins, repenting and turning from our sins and returning to God. The other penitential season is Lent. The fact that these seasons sometimes share Paraments reveals their similarities. Unfortunately, we have traded the spiritual preparations advised in the penitential seasons for worldly preparations for Christmas.

If we posed the question, what needs to be done before Christmas? We will find out what we really think about Advent. Many of us will have a list of tasks that need to be done, such as organising the guest list or coordinating with the host, organising the travel plans, preparing the menu, preparing and installing decorations, including the tree, buying and posting presents. Then there are all the Christmas parties at workplaces, social clubs, schools... Some of us might be exhausted just thinking about it. These things aren't necessarily bad, but the season of Advent doesn't need to be consumed by these things; there is a more important purpose for Advent.

Advent is a time for waiting, preparing and hoping. We are waiting and preparing for our Saviour.

Now, if, like Kenny Chesney, we think we can somehow flick a switch or buy a ticket in our own time to enter heaven, we really have no need for a saviour. We will identify ourselves as righteous in our own eyes. We will think we have done enough good to get into heaven; we are good people, after all. But is that really what we find when we look at ourselves honestly during these penitential seasons?

We need to be prepared to receive Him. And that means we need to be aware of our sin. We're not just talking about sinful actions. When we really analyse ourselves and compare what God requires of us, we find that we have sinful actions and sinful thoughts, and, driving all this, our sinful motivations come out of our sinful hearts! Our desire is to serve ourselves, to be most important, and to be number one. These are some of the motivations we find in our hearts. We can draw two conclusions from that: a. I am a terrible sinner, worse than everyone else, or b. I'm just like everyone else. That's what the bible tells us, and if we dare to look, that's what our experience in the world tells us. Everyone is out to look after themselves.

This is precisely why we need a Saviour. If we were perfect and righteous as we were created to be, we would have no need for Jesus. It is because we are sinners right to our core that we need

to be saved, even from ourselves, and turned around from our own self-serving to be served by Christ.

Jesus says in today's Gospel reading about how we should be waiting and preparing; "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap". Luke 21:34 (NIV)

Don't miss the picture. When Jesus says, 'like a trap,' understand what a trap is intended to do. He is not just talking about the surprise element of his return because of the distraction. A trap is intended to kill. If you set a trap for a mouse in your house, what is your intention? A trap is a tool for both capture and destruction. This leads us to understand the gravity of the warning Jesus offers. We must always be prepared so that we are not surprised and destroyed by his return. He gives us three things that will distract us from our preparation: carousing or dissipation, drunkenness and the cares of this life. Carousing and drunkenness relate to the overconsumption of alcohol and the obsession with the pleasures of the body. This distraction would be that we are in a drunken stupor. Perhaps we live as if this life does not matter, and to escape this life, we over-consume alcohol, or we are so captivated by the pleasure that we over-indulge, and so we are not prepared for Christ's return. The Idolization of the drug replaces the fear, love, and trust of God. Thus, this warning is so that we will not be distracted, but we will be focused on Him when He returns. Of course, we can see that alcohol is not the only thing that can consume our life and time; we might be addicted to all manner of activities or devices that leave us unprepared for Jesus' return.

Secondly, Jesus talks about the cares of this life, the worries and anxieties of this life. We should be reminded here of Jesus' command that we should not worry because God has our lives in his control. We should also be reminded of Jesus' Parable of the Sower, who sows his seed in many places, including the areas where the seed grows, has faith, but then the worries and cares of this life choke out the faith. We do not want to lose our faith because the concerns of this life overcome us. Instead, when we notice that our worries and cares overcome us, we want to return to the Saviour who promises to have our life in his hands. Who tells us he is the alpha and omega and has this world in his control. Who came to us to save us from our sin, yes, even our sin of worry, which is a breaking of the first commandment. Who comforts us with his forgiveness and promises that we belong to him, that he has claimed us as his own, is holding us safe in his hands, and that even the hairs on our heads are numbered.

These warnings remind us to turn from our idolatry, to turn back to Jesus, to read the signs, and know that his return is imminent. Because His return has been imminent ever since He left in the clouds, and He will return in that same way. While we see the world disintegrating around us, we are not to worry and become perplexed or anxious about this; instead, we are to be excited and hopeful that the day is drawing near when Christ will return.

We are also reminded to read the signs of the times and always be prepared. I only need to say a little about reading these signs. We should not try to identify specific signs and make measurements about when Christ will return as if we can predict that he will come after that

next earthquake or after the next eclipse; that is not the reason he points to the signs. He wants us to see the signs, the wars, the weather, the sun, the moon and the stars and be reminded that he is coming soon. The signs should be a reminder of watchfulness for his return.

How should we hope for Christ's return?

Last week, we learnt that God is in control of this earth and will return to end it when he is ready. While we think we can control all things, we can't, and we must realise that life on this earth is temporary, as Jesus reminds us in today's Gospel reading. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Luke 21:33 (ESV) But fear of the end should not be our sole focus, for our faith hopes for something more after life on this earth.

Hope should really be our driver for preparation. Hope that this sphere of death, this revolving rock is not all there is for us. That God has something better prepared for those who believe in him. We have a sure hope that he will return for us, and in doing so, we need to be reminded that he has already come to us as one of us, as a weak and helpless baby, God's Son, to save us. We hope not in what we do, not in what we control, but in what God has done for us. We put our hope in the incarnation of Christ as a human being. We put our hope in our connectedness with Him in our Baptism; we put our hope in the Sacrament of the Altar, His body and blood coming to us, right into us, so that we don't need to trust in what we do, but we are turned from our earthly preparations to focus on the preparations that Jesus has already made for us. We hope that what Jesus has for us is eternal. As he promises, heaven and earth will pass away; that is, all that is created will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Therefore, our hope is in his word; it is his word that gives the sacraments their power. It is his word that we need to deliver Jesus to us; it is his word that we need to keep us prepared for his return. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31–32 (ESV)

Jesus' proclamation of salvation through Himself alone is eternal, just like He is eternal. Everything else will break, fall apart, disappear, fade like flowers, and wither like grass, but Jesus' word, Jesus' salvation, is eternal.

This Advent, we will be reminded of Jesus' coming, coming to us in his Word, coming to us as an infant to share this life with us, and His second coming to take us to be with him for all eternity. As we are reminded of His coming, we pray that we are waiting, preparing, and hoping for Him.

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Do not be fainting with fear, do not be distracted and trapped, be waiting with joyful anticipation for your redemption drawing near!

For you belong to him, you have his word, and he has you. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 5:24 (ESV)

Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.