

2 Advent Sermon
December 5, 2010

There are eight historic references to give us the specificity of time in which these things happened. God has given us a clear sign where there is no guess work, but realities which point to the truth. God knows that every generation is filled with skeptics and those who do not want to believe. But God has prepared the way for those who are willing to think outside of themselves or their own circumstances. Each day has trouble of its own, but each day also has opportunities through which God provides for us to marvel at the goodness of our Lord.

What has our Lord come to do? To what are we looking forward? Why is it we become so anxious, worrying about what tomorrow will bring? It does seem to be a part of the human condition. The human fallen condition. God did not create us to be constantly in fear, worrying about so many things. He placed Adam and Eve in a perfect garden. How long were they there? Maybe the earth *is* billions of years old and the two were in the garden the whole time. Maybe God created everything to look old. There are more questions that answers to these things, but they really are not all that important. What our Lord has done, is doing, and will do is more important. You see, this is His world and He has released creation to go where it is going, but it is in His hand and things will be as He determined from the beginning. And here is the amazing thing: He is bringing it all together without coercion, intimidation, or any of the sinful manipulative ways in which things seem to be done in this age.

Think about John the Baptist living on the fringe of society, by the river Jordan, preaching a message of repentance, and baptizing - immersing - into repentance. What does this mean? It means living and looking for the places where one is not in harmony with the Lord. I do not know about you truly, but daily the Holy Spirit uncovers things in me which require change and change begins with acknowledging the need and then turning away from the wrong direction I have been heading. In a month, many will make New Year's resolutions. This is not repentance (although there is an element of it in there), for it relies upon the self and self-determination, which is why it often fails. Repentance of sin really is much simpler than that. To truly repent, in one sense, is to give up, dare I say, "Die?"

I find in myself the idea that when I discover a sin, I acknowledge it and then turn around and make a list of excuses as long as your arm. There is no excuse for sin. True repentance brings me to a place of hopelessness. Perhaps this is why so many are afraid of truly trying Christianity. They are thinking that it is pathetic to live confessing that we are helpless. And this is where they are wrong. In the moment of true repentance, it may be a moment in which we discover that we can no longer hope in ourselves, but, dear Christian, it is here that we meet hope for the first time. It is said that God does not give you more than you can handle. What rubbish. When we are in a hopeless situation with more than we can handle, God is there to lift us up into a new life. Our dependance *is* upon the Lord!

The solace in our day comes slightly with the reality that some of our laments are not just us, but across the nation. No matter the brand or location, the church has seemingly dwindled. I said seemingly because that is my view, not God's. In that moment, I discover that I have been unfaithful and need to repent. I am trusting in what I see and not in who our Lord is. I buy into the culture's use of broad-sweeping platitudes and categorizations. I am wrong. Jesus came to save all who believe and belief is what we do based upon that in which we have faith. It is not just *going* to church and saying, "I am a Christian," as fine as these things are. Here is the part we do not like. We must die to ourselves. If we are to be resurrected with Christ, it means we

must die. I am sorry to have to go into this, but I must. To die to sin, death, and the devil is not just a platitude, but a reality. It is to see those places the Holy Spirit shows us where we need to give up and hand the whole thing over. It is in this place that we discover – some for the first time – that God means this as serious business and our Lord will not just do an extreme make-over, but actually conform us to the image of Christ. He levels the playing field for all of us. “Make His paths straight.” They are narrow and straight. They are one person wide, for each of us has an eternal destiny, being saved individually. Those who believe are promised eternal life as it is meant to be and will be lived.

You see, as the Lord declared through the words of the prophet Malachai, the Lord will refine us like silver. And how is silver refined? It is melted and the dross scraped off. When is it pure? When a perfect reflection of the refiner is seen in the liquid silver. Do you now see that when we reflect the image of Christ we are pure? This is not a suggestion, but salvation itself, that we become like Christ. As the Apostle John wrote in his Epistle, “We shall be like Christ.” But who likes the idea of being refined? I do not, but it is reality. Daily, I am refined through the journey which begins with repentance. To not be refined is to increase with impurities until there is nothing but dirt and grime. Purity or filth, this is the contrast. There is not, nor can there be a middle ground.

Therefore, let us begin again and see that the knowledge of salvation comes through the forgiveness of sin, and sanctification comes through the refining fire of this age in which our Savior will purify us to be holy even as He is holy.

In Salvation, we are rescued from our enemies. And who are our enemies? Sin, death, and the devil, for we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and forces of darkness in this age. Having been rescued from the fear, anxiety, and hopelessness of this age, we are free to serve the Lord without fear. I do fear getting it wrong, but the Lord reminds you and me that He died for the forgiveness of your and my sin. Not an excuse, but redemption. This is a part of the refining process. So, we walk being forgiven to serve the Lord each day in whatever He gives us to do. God’s mercy is tender. He is not harsh, as is this world, but tender and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Please repent and be rid of the notion that God is seeking the chance to condemn and destroy you. That is the devil. That is what he does. He kills, steals, and destroys. Look around and you will see much devilishness at work. But you are free to serve the Lord without the fear that is rampant in this world. Look, Covid may kill this body, but the Lord will resurrect me on the last day. It does not mean that I live frivolously, nor fatalistically, but that I trust the Lord over all the fear mongers that have their own reasons for why they do what they do. And I respect those who are living in fear with the hope that I can impart to them the hope of Christ so that they may no longer live in the fear of this age.

Look around. We are mostly older folk. So many say, “The church is dying and we need young people to revive the church”. That is talk of hopelessness with what we understand and see. Thus saith the Lord, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word abides forever.” Things are never as they seem. We have lived through an age of bounty, plenty, and great abundance. We are living in a time of increasing uncertainty. The Lord still sits on His throne, having overcome all adversity. But now is the time of bringing all things into subjection. It begins with you and me. Will we live lives of repentance, give up, and let the Lord be Lord in our life? Do you see the light shining? I do. The Lord has marvelously poised us to be a beacon of light in our community. I do not worry about the seeming dry fields and withering crop that

we see as the church. We are called to prepare for the harvest. It is coming. This is the Lord's church and He knows what He is doing. I believe He has poised us to receive the harvest that is coming. I have hope upon hope because our Lord and Savior specializes in raising the dead. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Look at the cross. See salvation. Share the hope we all have in Christ. It is not just the only hope for this world, it is hope beyond hope that is, quite literally out of this world. The field is level. We have hope. Live in the freedom of Christ and marvel at what He will do through us in this place! Amen.