

A sermon preached at Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield, CT  
1 Advent, November 27, 2022 by The Rt. Rev. Gordon P. Scruton  
Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5, Psalm 122, Romans 13:11-14, Matthew 24:36-44

Christians refer to the four weeks before Christmas as the season of Advent. Advent is the Latin word for coming. Advent is perhaps the most confusing season of the Church Year because as our secular society becomes more frenetic and driven by addictive purchasing, we invited to become more reflective and focused on preparing for the coming of Christ.

To help us stay focused on the deeper meaning of these weeks before Christmas, our Advent Scripture readings and prayers focus on remembering and preparing for the three comings of Christ: First, remembering with gratitude Christ's coming to earth as a babe in Bethlehem, as God's Messiah, fore told by the prophets; Second, on preparing for Christ's future coming at the end of the world; and Third, recognizing and welcoming Christ's daily coming into each moment of our lives.

On this first Sunday of Advent, the Scripture readings remind us that Christ will come again to earth as our Judge, to bring human history to an end on this planet. As Jesus said in today's Gospel, no one knows when this final Judgement Day will come. Jesus simply says, be awake, be ready, be prepared for Christ to come again at any time.

Most of us don't reflect much about meeting Christ face to face at the time of our death or when Christ comes to earth again. Yet today's Scriptures call us to pause in the rush of our lives to ponder these realities. This is a time to ask: Since God created me, what does God expect from me today and by the end of my life?

The Scripture tells us that we are not created to simply do whatever we want to do. God has expectations for us. We are not here to simply survive until we die and try to complete our list of things to be done. We are not here to get the approval of others and appear successful. We are not here buy and consume as much as we can for as long as we can.

God created each of us out of love to fulfill the mission and purpose for which God sent us to this planet. God's Holy Spirit, given to us in our Baptism, wants to flow through our unique personalities and gifts and situation in life so that we radiate and embody love for God and our neighbors through our daily thoughts, words, and actions.

Of course, none of us do this perfectly, but one day at a time, we ask God to help us keep following Christ, our Good Shepherd. We draw our strength and guidance from Christ's constant love for us. We know that at the end of our lives, every person will be judged on the quality of our love for God, our neighbors and ourselves. So, we never stop seeking to learn and grow. It doesn't matter how young or old we are. It doesn't matter how faithful or unfaithful we are. Every day of our lives, God invites us to begin again, giving thanks for God's

love for us and asking God to help us learn, in this one day, how we can better fulfill the loving purpose for which God put us right where we are.

We say in the Creed each week that we believe Christ “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” Some people have a sense of dread and overwhelming fear when they think of Christ coming to be our Judge. Judgment Day will certainly be an awesome day. We will all be overwhelmed by the Light, the Glory and Power of God, and by our vulnerabilities and unworthiness as we stand before Christ and our lives are replayed before him.

The Bible also tells us that God is not a vindictive, cruel, or unjust judge to those who ask for his help and mercy. The prophets speak of God’s coming as a consuming fire. Yet the fire of God’s presence does not destroy us. It is like a refining, purifying fire, burning off the impurities so that the pure gold of God’s Presence in us remains. On Judgment Day, by the mercy of Christ, all that is not good or right in us will be removed and destroyed, and all that is of God, all that is good and right about us will be purified. (e.g. Matt 3:12)

The Bible says that Christ’s coming again will be a time of ultimate hope for this planet. Why such hope? Because Christ will come again to bring God’s Kingdom, God’s New Creation on earth as it is in heaven. Christ will ultimately restore justice, peace, love, healing, salvation to this sinful and divided world. Why wouldn’t everyone look forward with eager hope and anticipation for the day when Christ will come again to make the world right, as God intended us to be, living in loving harmony with God, with all our neighbors, with ourselves, with all God’s creation?

Do you begin to see what a gift Christ’s second coming will be? Can you see how knowing that Christ will come again to be our Judge gives us a hopeful perspective on the future of the world and can guide our daily choices and attitudes?

The next question is, how do you and I prepare for Christ’s second coming and for God’s Judgment Day? The best way to prepare for Christ’s future coming is to welcome Christ’s daily coming into our lives. When we live our lives in the presence of Christ each day, then the Christ we meet on the Last Day will be the same Christ we have lived with every day. So, we will meet Christ, God’s Messiah, as our Judge and as our familiar teacher and friend.

Remember, Jesus promised, I will be with you always, even to the end of the world. Jesus promised to send us his Holy Spirit to live and love in and through us so that we can be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world each day. The Spirit of Jesus wants to flow through our daily relationships, through our faces, our eyes, our words, and actions so that we are instruments of God’s peace and justice and healing in the midst of this needy world.

Yet we often get so busy, so distracted that we forget to look for Christ coming into our lives each day. Fortunately, even when we forget God, God never stops sending Christ to weave his presence and guidance into our lives each day, whether we are aware or not.

Today's readings from Romans and Matthew urgently call us to wake up, to recognize and welcome Christ's constant coming into our lives each day. Yet, how can you and I learn to be more awake to the daily coming of Christ into our lives?

One way we can learn to be more awake to Christ's daily coming into our lives is to pay special attention to the way we begin and end each day. If we begin and end each day looking at or listening to the media's bad news of the day, we can feel overwhelmed by the problems of life. If we begin and end the day in conversation with Jesus, we may be filled with hope and gratitude as we wake up to recognize the many ways in which God is at work in our lives and in the world each day.

This week I invite you to take just 3 to 5 minutes every morning to find a quiet time and place to be alone with God. Please close your eyes now, and let's practice this morning prayer together right now.

Begin by taking a deep breath...as you breathe out, be aware that Jesus is right there with you, looking at you with a gentle, loving smile, eager to listen to you. Thank Jesus for being with you right now.... Imagine Jesus calling you by name and saying: "I love you. What do you want me to do for you today?"

I encourage you to make two requests of Jesus now and every morning: First: Ask Jesus to help you stay awake to recognize the ways in which God will be coming into your life today. Jesus, help me see moments of joy and beauty; see the acts of kindness, smiles, the willingness of others to support me; hear the whispers of your Spirit guiding me even in difficult and frustrating moments; help me recognize the little surprises and the moments of peace. Jesus, help me to recognize your loving presence and gifts in my life throughout today.

Second, ask, Jesus to help you recognize the opportunities God will give you today to pass on Christ's love and blessings to others, by your attitudes, thoughts, prayers, words, smiles, actions. Jesus, help me recognize who needs my support and encouragement today; and help me be willing to make little sacrifices of my own convenience so I can share your love and care with others throughout today.

At home, you can end your morning prayers by praying the Lord's Prayer.

Then, near the end of today and every day this week, find a special place to be quiet for 3 to 5 minutes. Again, take a deep breath...and give thanks that Christ is right there with you, looking at you with a gentle loving smile, eager to listen to you.

First, ask Jesus to help you recognize the ways he was at work in your life during the day by thinking back to your morning prayer time and re-playing the video of your day with Jesus. Notice little ways in which Jesus was always right there with you, blessing and guiding you. Notice all that was good and beautiful about the day. This is not a time to be critical of yourself

and your day. Just focus on the surprises, the little and big moments and blessings for which you are most thankful during the past day.

Second, re-play the video of your day again, this time asking Jesus to help you see what little opportunities he gave you to love and care for others by your thoughts, attitudes, smiles, words, and deeds. Give thanks for those opportunities you had to pass on the love of Jesus to others around you during the past day.

You can end this prayer of gratitude by asking God to give you a good night's sleep and prepare you to continue to grow in awareness of Christ's love for you tomorrow and to grow in awareness of the ways you can pass on God's love to others tomorrow. Then close with the Lord's Prayer.

Right now, in the silence, take a few moments to ask Jesus to help you practice these two morning and evening prayers this coming week...so you can learn to be more awake to recognize and share Christ's constant loving coming into your life this Advent...

Day by day, Dear Lord, three things we pray; to see You more clearly, love You more dearly, follow You more nearly, day by day, through Christ our Lord. Amen.