**Waiting Expectantly Dec** 1, 2024 Lk 21:25-36

“***Pray that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.***”

* Today is the 1st Sunday in Advent – a season that is meant to prepare us for the **joy** of Christmas
* As we lit the Advent wreath, we prayed for hope in God’s promise that Christ will come again to fill our lives and the life of the world with love and joy and peace.
* The text just read from Luke’s gospel may seem strange for a text to precede Christmas & prepare us for the joy of Christmas.
* No mention of shepherds, manger, or baby Jesus.
* Yes, Advent is a time to prepare for Christmas & acknowledge the Christ Child.
* But as we prepare for Christmas, it is not meant to be a preparation for just a single event.
* As important as the Christmas event is in acknowledging the coming of Jesus, we must also look beyond Christmas &

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 realize that there will be a 2nd coming.

* Gospel reading is rather an exhortation to readiness
* The wonderful truth here is when we discover our readiness beyond Christmas we discover at the same time, the joy of Christmas.
* The joy of knowing that Jesus is a reality in our lives and that He came so that we can be reconciled with the very author of life.
* Today’s gospel reading is a dramatic reading that describes the signs of the end of the world.
* Earlier in this chapter, it is even more graphic where we read about earthquakes and wars & general chaos as societies break down.
* And when we look about us, even today, we can see such things with surprisingly accuracy.
* Jesus said: ***Look at the fig tree & all the trees. When their leaves come out no one doubts that indeed summer is***

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***coming***.

* Likewise, with the signs around us everywhere in the world, we should have no doubt that the end is coming just as Jesus said it would.
* But attempting to determine when that day would be is the furtherest from what Jesus meant or intended from these words.
* ***No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father***. (Mark 13:32)
* This passage is not about determining **when** – it is simply to make the point that we should be ready at all times.
* That is what Advent is all about – preparing for Jesus – Being ready.
* Involves both having Jesus in our lives today & being prepared for His 2nd coming.
* The two events are quite inseparable
* The wonderful thing is that if Jesus is truly a reality in our lives today, then we will discover that we already are fully

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prepared for His 2nd coming.

* Conversely, the only way to prepare for the 2nd coming is to accept His 1st coming so that Jesus is a reality in our lives today.
* There is a reality in today’s gospel reading because it describes two kinds of people at the 2nd coming.
1. Those who will be in such fear they will faint from terror.
2. Those who can stand up & lift their heads because they are assured of their redemption.
* God’s Word tells us that at that time **everyone** will see Jesus & will recognize Him
* No one will be able to deny God’s presence
* For now, His presence is available only to believers, but then the denial of God will be impossible because He will be too obvious to do so.
* At that time, the appearance of the Son of man will be, for unbelievers & the

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unfaithful – it will be an encounter with a stranger.

* For the faithful believer, it will be a meeting with a friend – a friend they have come to know through spending time with Him.
* Advent is really about preparing for the rest of our lives.
* How do we do that?
* I believe we can start by asking ourselves: “Do our lives reflect Christ in that we are growing in our relationship with Him?”
* There are two theological words that describe this reality - **Justification** & **Sanctification.**
* **Justification** simply means that we are justified – justice has been done as Jesus has paid for your sins and mine.
* **Sanctification** is what is happening to us after we accept Jesus into our lives and continue our journey in Him, becoming more and more Christlike.
* As weare being sanctified, it is not so

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important that we can say that we have accomplished this or that on our journey.

* Rather, the more important thing is that we are on the journey - a path of growth?
* A good way for Advent preparedness is to examine ourselves to determine that we are indeed on that journey.
* In our self-examination, should we discover that we are really missing the mark in some areas, should we beat ourselves up and feel guilty.
* Yes and no
* Feel guilty – yes
* Beat ourselves up – no
* Because everyone of us miss the mark, we should definitely feel guilty about it.
* The late John Stott explains this in his book called The Cross of Christ.
* According to John Stott, our guilt is simply the acknowledgement of human responsibility concerning sin.
* He uses the story of the Prodigal Son to

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illustrate this.

* He said the prodigal son had to “come to himself” (acknowledge his self-centeredness) before he could “come to his father”.
* The humiliation of penitence was necessary before the joy of reconciliation.
* There would have been no ring, no robe, no kiss, no feast if he had remained in the far country or returned unpenitent.
* Stott says a guilty conscience is a great blessing, but only if it drives us to come home.
* St Paul calls this ‘Godly sorrow’. In 2 Corinthians he said: “***Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.***” (2 Cor 7:10)
* Today’s gospel is clearly pointing to end times with the overarching theme being: “***Be Ready***”
* Sadly some people become complacent and even self-righteous thinking that

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after 2000 years, and it not happening, we really don’t need to concern ourselves about the end of time.

* I discovered the response to this attitude last week as Jean and I were doing our ‘*Time With Abba*’ Bible reading and it is found in 2 Peter.
* “***With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance***.” (2 Peter 3:8-9)
* As we begin a new year on the Church calendar, we not only look to ourselves.
* We may also be asking who are we as Christ the Redeemer Church?
* What will become in this new year? Will we grow?
* I remind you the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18, “***I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.***”

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* Jesus will indeed build His Church – that is His promise, so it’s not something that we should be worrying about.
* Our concern should be primarily ourselves on our journey to sanctification.
* I think however that we can be assured of something
* If we are growing in Christ, we will discover that he will use us and the church will grow. If not growing in Christ, then we can expect the opposite.
* Before we can expect numerical growth, we first have to have a passion ourselves to seek & to serve God.
* True growth in Christ is not about how many people that are seated in a church on a Sunday
* Rather it’s about how much I am willing to grow & allow Christ to transform me.
* As I am being transformed, I will develop a passion for others to know the same growth & freedom that I know.

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* That is called evangelization.
* That is the only growth that matters – God will take care of the rest.
* What better way to begin Advent and be ready than to recommit ourselves to Christ.
* In other words I would like to invite you to commit or recommit yourselves to Jesus by simply saying the sinners’ prayer together.

*Lord Jesus, I confess to you now that I have missed the mark and that I am a sinner. I am sorry for my sins and I turn from them now. I thank you that you died on the cross to pay the price fully and completely for my sins.*

*I receive your forgiveness and I turn to you now and acknowledge you as Lord of my life.*

*Fill me now with Your Holy Spirit to guide me and empower me to grow in You. Amen*

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If you prayed this prayer today for the 1st time or the 10th time, you need to believe

that you are indeed justified – whatever your past sins may have been, they have been paid for in full and have no control over your new life in Christ. You are now growing on a path to sanctification.