

Ad Te Levavi (First Sunday in Advent): December 3, 2023
“Proper Prior Planning Prevents Positively Poor Performance”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord.”¹ In our postmodern-day world, Advent seems to be a lost season. Stores are all decked out in Christmas adornment, Christmas music fills the air, and even the church and homes of Christians are filled with the garb of Christmas, mine included. But here’s the kicker, Christmas has not started yet. The celebration does not happen until the proper preparations have been made. Certain steps must be taken, but you know that, step one comes before step two, and if you need further proof, don’t clean, bake, or buy anything for your family Christmas celebration, just tell them to show up. I would like to think that is why many put up the Christmas decorations early; we just want to be prepared.

But prepared for what? What’s the game? Whose the enemy? What’s the goal? That seems to be a harder question that is ever on the move. We sing of preparation in worldly songs this time of year. We sing songs about being good so that we will be rewarded with good gifts at the end, “You better watch out. You better not cry? You better not pout.” Is that for what we are preparing?

There is more to this mortal life. Having or not having are important, even more so for eternal life. It is not just our own predilections towards temper tantrums or greed to obtain more or keep what we have that we seek to prepare for this coming month. God’s Holy word tells us that sin, death, and the devil are also our enemies. They drive their cause with wickedness and evil with tactics that seem to take on so many different forms that how does one really prepare for all of that?

I think I have used this phrase here before, but by way of reminder, memorize the 7 “P’s”: proper prior planning prevents positively poor performance. No one really likes to prepare, it’s the celebration we want. We want the glory, not the work. Preparation is hard work. Celebration is easy, but preparation is necessary. “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord.”

¹ Jeremiah 23:5

That is just what we are doing. Advent is a time in which we prepare for the coming of the Lord. As Christians, we take time to prepare for not just the celebration of His birth at Christmastime; rather, we really are engaged in preparing for His final coming. In our collects for this season, we will be hearing the words, “Stir up our hearts, O Lord, and come.” Our King is coming in all glory, power, and might. Our hearts, minds, lives, and entire beings must be prepared for that day when He comes.

Our first Sunday of Advent gives us a preparation call through the Prophet Jeremiah. Poor Jeremiah. If there was ever a job you did not want, it would be probably be his. He was called to prophesy to the people of God during a terrible time and to bring messages of truth that people didn’t want to hear. The land was full of idolatry and vices ran the day. Any prophets who spoke against the people’s pet sins, moral corruption, shortcomings, wickedness, or any depravity were killed, or worse. It was not politically correct to talk about sin and failure, the Law of God and man’s weaknesses.

Jeremiah had to say hard things to obstinately wicked people for over 40 years. For 4 decades, Jeremiah was in the same place, speaking the same message of God’s Word to the same people, and things went from bad to worse. Just how bad was it? Jeremiah lived some 620 years before the birth of Christ. Under King Josiah, all was fairly good for him. Then Josiah died and was followed by a series of evil kings—names like Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. Each of these was a descendant of David, each a legitimate king who was to shepherd the people of Judah, and each a king who led the nation to disaster. Jeremiah warned them and, instead of repenting, they persecuted the prophet.

Finally, the Babylonians captured Judah, and in 586 B.C. they destroyed the temple and took many of the inhabitants of the land away into exile. Jeremiah had to experience and see with his own eyes the land destroyed, and the people carried away amid great misery and bloodshed. Then he had to preach and suffer in Egypt of all places, where he was stoned by his own people. Merry Christmas.

The tactics of the evil one has not changed all that much, has it? We find ourselves in much the same times as Jeremiah. God's Word is challenged. Moral depravity only seems to matter depending on what side of the aisle you sit on, and to speak against the utter sin and corruption of man is met with forceful challenge.

It is not popular to talk of sin, nor is it politically correct to stand true to the very Law of God. The shepherds, the kings, the leaders of today, just like in Jeremiah's day, are not living in righteousness, nor are they doing justice. God's people are being driven away. The devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh is seeking the celebration of myself and my own moral accomplishments. Forget the preparation, and bring on the party.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch.”² From the weak, brittle and broken trees of our fallen humanity, from our dead stump of utter depravity, God will raise up a righteous branch. A righteous sprout from the very seed promised to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. This tender shoot will be cut-down in its prime, or rather, give its life to save the stump.

This very branch will be a king unlike the current reigning leaders. He will literally king kingly. As you picture the perfect, ideal king in all honor, integrity, decency, uprightness and moral rectitude that will be the very being of this king. He will rule over His land with all prudence, wisdom, and understanding. For every day that He reigns, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. That is a big deal as Judah, the Southern Kingdom, is under threat by Egypt, and Israel, the Northern Kingdom, is under threat by Babylon. The foreign powers, the enemies of God, sin, Satan, and death itself will be no match. This King reigns with all authority in heaven and earth given to Him, forever and ever.

See, it is not by their own power they are saved and dwell securely. It is not by your own power, you are saved and dwell securely. The name of the one who gets all the credit is this: The Lord is Our Righteousness. I am not my own savior. I am not my own righteousness. I am dead and need to be prepared.

² Jeremiah 23:5

Brothers and sisters, behold, the days are coming. Jeremiah tells God's people they will know Him by a different moniker. It will no longer be the God who brought them out of Egypt. The defining moment for understanding the reign and rule of this righteous seed will not be the deliverance from death, but rather, the Lord who brought up and led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where God had driven them. In other words, God will be known by His very act of restoration through the Promised Seed.

Jesus Christ is that promised seed. His act of restoration on the cross is for all those in the north country, that is Babylon, and the countries God had driven them. God drove them away from the Garden of Eden, away from the Tree of Life. Because of sin, man is driven away from a holy God. How can something unclean, common, and defiled, be in the very presence of a holy and righteous God? You wouldn't bring a pie of blackbirds to set before the king.

But God does not desire the death of a sinner; rather, He desires they should turn to Him, repent of their sins, be baptized, be made clean. They must be prepared in order to celebrate. Jesus Christ, the righteous branch, the very seed of the house of Israel, was born, lived the perfect life, was crucified and died for your restoration. By His life, He lived in perfect righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. He kept the very Law of God.

He was not a very politically correct man, and the world wanted Him dead. He crashed the party, and He did the preparation. He was busy preparing for you. By His thoughts, words, and deeds, He did what you are commanded to do, and fail to do. He kept the Law of God for you and died in your place, so that you will be made right with God.

He is your righteousness, your state of being right. This gift He gives you freely. He prepares you in the waters of Holy Baptism. You are washed, and your dead heart is regenerated. You are then nourished and fed by His own words. He teaches, rebukes, corrects, and trains you in righteousness, as you hear His words and through the strength of His Holy Spirit, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them. He has done all the work, for you to celebrate these, His gifts.

Through the Holy Spirit, Jeremiah prophesied that after God's people are restored and brought together from the pits of death and destruction that they suffer in Babylon, "***Then they shall dwell in their own land.***"³ Literally the Hebrew reads, "*They will marry (or abide) in their own land.*" For Israel, this meant the promised land, for you it means God's Promised Land. In the days of glory, when Christ shall come with all His angels, all things thus being prepared, and His people living in saving faith, you will live forever in the new heavens and the new earth.

It is hard for me to not make a bigger deal out of this small word. The language of "marry," the married relationship is how God talks about the relationship Christ has with the Church. He is the bridegroom, the Church is the bride. She is adorned by Him, washed and cleansed by Him, prepared by Him for Him in all holiness and splendor without wrinkle, or spot, or any such stain. Think of how much preparation goes into a wedding, to celebrate that one day, and now magnify that exponentially, and you get the depth of the Scriptures.

How much preparation goes into the adorning of you? How much work does God put in for you? He has changed you, taken you from death into life. He has made you heirs of His everlasting Kingdom. You are part of the bride, His bride. He is your groom and everything that you have is His. Your sin, immorality, brokenness of tongue, heart, and life are His. He has taken it to the cross and buried it in the tomb.

That also means that everything that is His belongs to you! Holiness, righteousness, innocence, blessedness, wisdom, justice, forgiveness, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.⁴ Heaven is yours. Salvation is yours. Eternal life is yours.

Preparation is necessary, and Christ has done it properly and positively. He has planned for your eternal salvation and performs it through the death of His Son, and gives it to you through water, word, bread and wine.

³ Jeremiah 23:8

⁴ Cf. Galatians 5:22–23

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord.”⁵ The future peace of eternity awaits us all, but His days of Salvation have come. Peace is yours. God has declared it and given it to you. Even while the devil seeks to take it away; the peace of God that passes all understanding, even the devil’s, the world’s, and our own sinful flesh, has been bestowed to you. In the world’s darkness, among the world’s darkness, TO the world’s darkness, Christ has come!

As we prepare this Advent season, we pray,

“From the manger newborn light
Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides;
In this light faith now abides.

Glory to the Father sing,
Glory to the Son, our king,
Glory to the Spirit be
Now and through eternity.”⁶ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁵ Jeremiah 23:5

⁶ Savior of the Nations Come LSB 332:7-8

Prayer of the Church
First Sunday in Advent (Ad Te Levavi)
3 December 2023

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Gracious Lord, awaken Your saints from sleep and idleness as we enter another Church Year. Encourage the preachers of Your Word and all who hear, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Give boldness and faithfulness to Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; Sam, our circuit visitor; and all pastors in Christ. Renew the faith and quicken the love of all Christians to cast off the works of darkness, put on Jesus Christ and live as children of the eternal day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of love, visit our homes and defend us from the temptation to walk in the works of darkness. Clothe us with the armor of light. Preserve the single in holiness, and lead husbands and wives to love one another and raise their children in the faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, behold our nation and its leaders and protect our armed forces, taking them under Your care and blessing. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You extend Your care and blessing to young and old. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Alivia, Gabe, and Gavin* celebrate their birthdays, and *Kevin and Zach* celebrate their baptismal anniversaries. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Visit us in Your compassion, O Lord. Deliver the sick from their infirmity, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow and the dying from their fear *especially Esther, Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Betty, Jeri, Denise, Jillian, Marv, Pastor Small, Debbie and those we name in our hearts.* May all who cry to You receive grace according to Your will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Lord, Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, entered Jerusalem to shouts and cheers of joy. Grant that we may be stirred by the Word and Sacraments to rejoice anew, now and at His second advent. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, You declared that the days were coming when You would accomplish our salvation, and in Your time You caused Your Son, the righteous Branch, to spring up for David. By Your grace, keep us joined as branches to Christ, that we might bear fruit until the day He returns in glory; for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**