

Mark 21 December 3, 2006

Welcome to Advent. As Pastor Gary mentioned last week the church year is different from our regular calendar year. Our church year follows the life of Christ.

So the first season, Advent is the season of preparation. A season to preparation looking to the past and looking to the future. We look to the past and prepare for celebrating the birth of Jesus. I think we are all over that. Just look at this place.

Or drive down the streets in town with all their lights. The fact is, we are not only preparing to celebrate Christmas many of us are already celebrating Christmas. Of course it is debatable whether or not all the celebration is connected to Jesus or not.

The season of advent is not only about looking back it is about looking to the future. We look back to Jesus' birth we look ahead to when he will come again. This week the first week of Advent is about looking to the future and the next three weeks are about looking back.

34“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, 35like a trap.

Our reading challenges us to look ahead. I find it interesting how when Jesus talks about the future he is really talking about right now. Probably because if you want to be ready for the future and you don't know when the future will come, you have to be ready right now. So, in order to be ready for the future you have to be ready in the present.

Jesus says we are to be on our guard by: protecting our heart. Jesus doesn't want our hearts to be weighed down, (being weighed down is not a ready position.) Jesus doesn't want our hearts to be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness or the worries of this life.

First of all dissipation. I had to look up dissipation twice before I got a handle on it. Dissipation is wasteful expenditure or consumption, **wasteful expenditure or consumption.**

Remember the parable of the prodigal son? The younger son asks for his inheritance from his father even before his father dies. Nice kid. He takes all the money and uses it all up in dissolute living. That's dissipation. We usually think he spent it drinking and womanizing. That's part of dissipation but it's more than that its wasteful living. It is wasting our resources on Material things, drugs, alcohol, excessive food, excessive anything.

During this season we know about excessive. It could be excessive gift giving, excessive cookie eating, excessive celebrating.

When we are weighed down in wasteful living it burns up time, talents and treasures so that we aren't ready to use those things for the things that really matter.

I knew this high school coach who was totally against his athletes having a car. He said if you have a car you have to feed it. If you have to feed it you need money. If you need money you need a job. He feared he would lose his athletes to cars and money and jobs.

If you are in debt or I like to say owned by your, house your car your toys, your hobbies or habits, it will weigh you down, and you can't be ready.

Next Jesus talks about drunkenness. This has to do with more than drinking it's about everything. It's about everything we use to dull the pain and anguish and struggles of life. Drunkenness is not the only escape tool although for most Americans it is the method of choice.

Jesus is not talking about people who are clinically depressed who need prescription drugs to help them. Jesus is talking about when we as they say, self medicate. When we don't want to face the problems of life or can't face the challenges of life and won't get the proper medical help, counseling help, marital help and take matters into our own hands and take something that eases the pain. We are talking about when you use drugs or alcohol or food or bury yourself in work or hobbies or even religion, whatever so that you escape from reality because reality is so hard.

When we escape by numbing the pain we are also numb when it counts. Most of the things we use to numb our life aren't bad in them selves. For example some people numb themselves with wine. Now we know that wine can't be bad, it was one of Jesus' miracles. But the abuse or misuse of wine, using it to escape, will weigh us down so that we are not ready.

Last and certainly not least is worry. Worry can have a paralyzing effect. Worry for ourselves or for our loved ones can affect how we view life how we act in life, it can prevent us from doing the things we need to do and lead us to do things we wouldn't with a clear mind.

Of course we need to be concerned for ourselves or others. Remember we are not talking about escaping from reality. We are talking about facing reality. Facing it in a way that we can be of help and not an added problem.

We hear people say things like well at least I can worry. As if that is helpful, as if that shows that we care. All worry does is negatively effect your health and prevent you from helping in a constructive manner.

Jesus wants us to love and care. But we need to find a way to care so that it doesn't paralyze us. So that we can be of help. So that we are not weighed down and not ready.

The psalm for today is ps 25 it says: In you O Lord I lift up my soul. O my God, In you I trust.

Many times in psalms the psalmist is not only singing a song to his congregation of God's faithfulness, and justice and love so that the congregation will be encouraged to have faith and trust in God. Many times the psalmist is singing it to himself. Encouraging himself to have faith and trust.

Someone shared with me a wonderful way to lift up our soul to the Lord. If you would close your eyes try this with me. You take the problem or situation or person you are concerned about. You visualize it or them in your mind. Now in your mind wrap it up in a clothe or a blanket. Now offer it to Jesus. Ask Jesus to take it and take care of it. Please open you eyes.

We just celebrated Thanksgiving and we all have a lot to be thankful for. We also have to face the challenges and

Jesus is well aware of this. After all he does tell us to be aware and warns against facing life or I should say warns us against not facing life.

There will be times when we find it is too much for us. As the psalmist tells us let us lift up our souls to God. Let us not bail out on life when we face our struggles. Instead let us trust in him no matter what might happen.

As the Apostle Paul says, may the peace of God, that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our lord.

Amen.

December 16, 2008

Remember the movie "A few good men" with Jack Nicholson and Tom Cruise? Tom Cruise is a Naval Defense Attorney defending a Marine accused of murder. Tom Cruise calls Jack Nicholson to the stand. Nicholson plays General Jessip who has control of the base where the assault took place, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, the same base that the Al Quida terrorist prisoners are being held now.

The General doesn't feel that anyone has the right to ask him questions. He feels he and his job protecting the country is above everything. Tom Cruises character asks Jack Nicholson to tell him the truth of what happened. Nicholson tells him in that great line. "You can't handle the truth."

I wonder if this is what was happening in our gospel reading for today. The disciples come out of the temple with Jesus and they are like country folks going to NYC. They are looking at all the buildings and remarking, "Look at all these buildings and huge stones." Jesus apparently unimpressed remarks, "You see those large building and large stones not one will be left upon another. All will be thrown down."

Wow!! The disciples, Peter, James, and John the big three and in this case Andrew ask him privately. When will this take place? What will be the signs?

What are they really asking? Are they asking when the temple will be destroyed? Are they asking when the end of time, the end of the world will come? Are they asking when the last judgement will come? We really don't know. We do know that they are asking about the future. They want to know the future.

Jesus doesn't answer them. Well he answers them but he answers like politicians in a debate, they answer the question with the answer they want to give. Jesus says, Don't be led astray. Many will come in my name and say I am he.

When you hear of wars and rumors of wars. Nation against nation, earthquakes, famines, its not the end its only the beginning.

In other words. It is not for you or anyone to know. If someone comes and tells you they know when things will happen you know they are making it up or misdirected or whatever but they are not speaking the truth.

In other words if you want to know the future you can just forget it. Maybe Jesus like Jack Nicholson, (I don't suppose many people compare Jesus to Jack Nicholson) Maybe Jesus feels we can't handle the truth.

Why would we want to know the future? What good would it do us to know the future? Have you ever wanted to have one of those crystal balls that you could look into and see the future? Well it would make Powerball a lot easier. You would know the right time to buy life insurance. It would give you power.

Last week we had that movie with several performances deserving Oscar nominations. Penny played a Queen who went away leaving her servants behind. No one knew when or if she would return. Her servants didn't think the Queen could see or find out what they did in her absence. Little did they know that she could see them. She had never really left. She was always with them living as a sty warden. Living as one of the lowly ones.

What difference would it have made if they knew the future, if they would have known when she would return or if they realized that she was always with them?

What difference would it make if you know when the end of the world was coming? I wonder if we think about that much? I wonder if we worry about that? I wonder if we think about the possibility that Jesus is among us as the poor and lowly?

It has been said by Earnest Becker among others that we can't handle the truth. Becker says that we can't handle the truth of our mortality, the fact that some day we will die. We can't handle that information so we deny it.

But then someone dies, someone gets sick, we get sick, we turn 50 and the truth and the future becomes clearer to us. Where does this leave us?

In sickness, and health, prosperity and poverty, in birth and death, in the future and the past it leave us where we always have been in our saviors loving hands.

Can we trust him to keep all sickness, poverty, suffering and death away from us? No, but he calls us to trust him in the midst of all those things.

There will be wars and rumors of wars, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes there will be famines.

Because of Jesus you may get into trouble with the government, religious people, and you may be hated by all because of Jesus' name.

You may or may not be worried about the future. You may or may not be worried about the end of the world. But we will have to face whatever comes our way and Jesus will be with you to help you face it.

But God doesn't just call on us to trust Jesus in good times and bad. God calls us to help spread the word that Jesus will be there for anyone in good times or bad who calls on his name. The one who endures in faith to the end will be saved. So we are to encourage all to trust in the Lord and endure in faith.