

First Sunday of Advent
Sermon for December 2, 2007

Raymond Raney

Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:36-44

Welcome to Advent. We've changed the liturgical season after so many weeks caught in the Green of the season after Pentecost. Colors aren't the only thing that changes. Advent is the church new year, so we change years on the church calendar for Sunday.

We now return to the beginning of our three year cycle to year A, and with it most of our Gospels will be from Matthew. Last week we finished year C and concluded our journey through the Gospel of Luke. Next year, when we cross into year B, we'll read Mark. The fourth Gospel of John fills in during Lent and Holy Week.

Another change we're experiencing this week is moving from the lectionary of the prayer book to the Revised Common Lectionary. The lectionary is the calendar of readings that is set out for us. The prayer book lectionary was adopted in the late 1970s with the new prayer book, based on the lectionary adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969. The Revised Common Lectionary was developed among Protestant denominations and includes more works by women in the history of salvation and provides more continuity in some of the series of readings.

If you'd like to compare the BCP and RCL lectionaries, you can go to the [Lectionary Page](#) on the web to take a look. I much prefer the selection of the Romans reading from the RCL this week over the BCP selection about "not owing anyone anything." It just seems to fit.

"For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near."

I think this is a more fitting introduction to this day, The First Sunday of Advent.

The lectionary is not all that's changed: As you can see the colors have changed from the Green of the season after Pentecost, and from the white of the feast of Christ the King and Thanksgiving. We move into the four Sundays that precede Christmas. It's a time of anticipation, a time of wonder, a time of preparation, and a time of reflection.

There was a time when the church treated the season of Advent as a "little Lent." That's why the purple hues adorn the altar. We still use purple, but that's because we don't possess the vestments that would be fully appropriate – blue. We really need to think of Advent not as Lent. You'll notice that in describing Advent, I didn't use the word "repentance." This is not a time of repentance, any more than the Season after Pentecost. It's a time to prepare. Prepare for what? For the return of the Christ.

That's right, what all those TV preachers talk about, and the Left Behind books go on and on about. The Second Coming.

If you'll turn to page 57 in the hymnal, you'll see one of the best descriptions of what the end times are supposed to be. "Lo he comes with clouds descending ... (read together).

We'll be singing that in awhile. It's preparation for a day some dread and others look forward to. The dread is understandable: on that day the Son of Man will judge the quick and the dead. No one escapes judgment. That judgment is understandable dread, but it's also a delight for those who suffer under the oppression of others because in the light of the last day we are promised that all will be made right. So we wait for these weeks when we anticipate what we say in the Creed each week.

So to prepare ourselves, we have two tasks in the coming weeks. One is to prepare, to anticipate, to remember that Christ will come again.

We're told not to worry about when it will be. We won't be able to figure it out. It will come unannounced: an absolute surprise to everyone.

Our other task is to look forward to the nativity of the Baby Jesus: the divine birth of the son – the prince of peace.

Peace is the promise of the Psalms and the prophets.

Our Psalm today prays for peace and prosperity.

Isaiah foresees that peace will come. "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Advent is about the light amidst the darkness. December is the darkest month, and Christmas is near the darkest night of the year, when the light shines forth and conquers to dark. Each week in Advent we light another candle to increase the light we bring to the season. Amidst the cold and the early sunset, it's easy to forget the brightness of the day, and the light that is with us always.

It is the light of the Lord that we were invited to join last week in the epistle to the Colossians, that the Father enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light" And he has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son"

We also prepare by doing as Paul instructs and understanding that "salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.

As Paul instructs, "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling in the dark."

I've been thinking a lot about the armor of light. It'd make for great special effects for a movie. I can see the figures in dark putting on the armor made of light and them gleaming in the darkness.

As Paul says, we can put on the Lord, like a cloak. Wear the Lord as if God were a garment that we could put on for our protection, as it says in the Collect today, "no in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility."

We wait upon the Lord, and while we wait, we prepare, we mark the days with our good works among our fellow beings so that we can share the armor of light with all God's creatures.

As the Psalm today closes: “Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do you good.” That’s our work, and the armor of our prince of peace.