

Advent 1
November 27, 2022

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;
and all the nations shall flow to it,

³ and many peoples shall come, and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,^[a]
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;
and 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.

⁵ O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the LORD.

Commented [GB1]: Writer is acknowledging that, topographically speaking, Zion is not the "highest mountain".

Commented [GB2]: Acts 2

Commented [GB3]: i.e. a proclamation; fulfilled in Acts 2 when the apostles' voice "has gone out to all the earth" (Rom 10:18, Luke 24:47)

Commented [GB4]: Compare this reversal with the older Joel 3:10 which has agricultural implements converted to weapons.

Psalm 122

- ¹ I was glad when they | said to me,*
"Let us go to the | house | of the LORD."
- ² Now our | feet are standing*
within your gates, | O Jerusalem.
- ³ Jerusalem is built | as a city*
that is | at unity | with itself;
- ⁴ to which the tribes go up, the tribes | of the LORD,*
the assembly of Israel, to praise the name | of the LORD.
- ⁵ For there are the | thrones of judgment,*
the thrones of the | house of David.
- ⁶ Pray for the peace | of Jerusalem: *
"May they pros- | per who love you.
- ⁷ Peace be with- | in your walls*
and quietness with- | in your towers. |
- ⁸ For my brethren and com- | panions' sake,*
I pray for | your prosperity. |
- ⁹ Because of the house of the | LORD our God,*
I will seek to | do you good."

Commented [GB5]: Most likely the tabernacle given its date of writing.

Commented [GB6]: Or "bound firmly"

Commented [GB7]: "peace" references play on City of Peace: Jerusalem

Commented [GB8]: Or, "I will say, 'Peace be within you!'"

Rom 13:11-14

11 Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than **when we first believed.** **12** The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. **13** Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** **But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,** and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Commented [GB9]: Paul concedes a pre-believers time, but still makes no mention of a decision being the line of demarcation!

Commented [GB10]: Baptismal language;; Gal 3:27 the baptized have "put on Christ".

Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Commented [GB11]: See FD SC VIII 74

Commented [GB12]: "Taken" or "left" do not depend on behaviors but on Christ Jesus claiming who is his.

Commented [GB13]: Jesus does not say, "Be ready so that you'll know"; Noah did not know either.

Message: Jesus' Return: Threat, or Promise?

In this morning's gospel we are being given a warning, sternly delivered from the lips of Christ Jesus himself, so stern that it lands like a threat on our ears. Be prepared! Be ready! But calls for preparation and warnings don't make a lot of sense or have much of an impact if we don't know what's at stake! So, in the Isaiah text and psalm 122, we are given a look at what it is we're anticipating, what it is we're waiting for. They are giving us a glimpse of what is to come. Then we hear Christ Jesus come behind them and say, "See there? That's what I'm talking about! Don't miss it!"

In the gospel, we hear Christ Jesus declare in no uncertain terms that the Son of Man will come again. In that declaration, we once again encounter the odd tension of the mystery of the faith: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. It's a peculiar thing to focus on as we await the celebration of the incarnation – that unique moment in time when God became man. Amid the excitement of the anticipation of Christmas, the words of Jesus have a distinctly somber tone; the images he uses call up less than cheery scenes: the destruction by the flood and a thief breaking into a home. So what are the real issues contained in the season of Advent? Is Jesus giving us a warning, or is he reiterating a promise?

Part of the answer lies in understanding the purpose of Advent. In western cultures, perhaps especially as consumer driven Americans, if we think of Advent as a time of preparation at all, we tend to think of it as a time to ask, *Is the house cleaned and decorated? Have all the gifts been purchased? Is the menu complete and the foods purchased?* But in the early history of the church, Advent was understood as a mini-Lent – a time of meditation, reflection – a time of soul-searching. It was a time to ask of oneself, "*Am I ready?*"

Part of answering that question involves addressing the issue of the reality of Jesus' return. Will he really come again? In the face of current events experienced by every age, we begin to wonder that if God were coming, he ought to have made it by now! As it happened in the early Christian community, we, too, can get exhausted by the process of waiting. It's hard to live constantly on our tiptoes! It's hard to live expecting something that always right around the corner but never quite arriving! Like the early community of believers, we, too, can start to give up on the promise. But when we do that, we throw ourselves back into the destructive maw of things as they are. Isaiah and the psalmist lay before us again what the promise is, what the end time looks like, what we're waiting for: *Yes, it's real! Yes, it will happen!*

When Jesus warns us of its arrival with images of thieves in the night and workers in the field and at the mill, one being taken and one being left, the abruptness is the issue, not who's disappeared and who hasn't! Time's too short, and we don't have time to waste arguing about how much time is left! Similarly, the apostle Paul give us a reveille call – that its' time to wake up and smell the coffee – The hour is close, closer now than when we started! "No drunken orgies today – I'm busy!" We don't have time for that foolishness! Don't make provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires! The flesh wants to boast in itself, its own accomplishments and achievements – self-gratification! Don't give it an opportunity! There's just no time for it!

So, what are we supposed to be doing in the meantime? The scriptures are full of descriptions of what being alert, awake, busy, and hard at work look like. The prophet Micah reminds us that the God of Israel has shown us what is good and what the Lord requires is that we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Jesus himself puts the same demand in more familiar terms: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and your neighbor as yourself."

And with that, the Holy Spirit reawakens the sense of threat within us. If that's the criteria for being ready, we've got a big problem! We just began our worship by confessing that we have *not* loved him with our whole heart and we have *not* loved our neighbor as ourselves! And no amount of trying to do better is going to fix it! How much better do we need to do? How much more do we need to love our neighbor? How much is 'with our whole heart'? We have just run full force into the Law! Jesus has just told us in no uncertain terms to be ready, and we almost immediately discover that we aren't ready and we can't turn it around.

But that's what the Law does. It shows us God's demands in one hand and holds a mirror in front of us with the other! It's not only easy to become disheartened, it's natural and inevitable! But the ultimate use of the Law is to drive us to Christ Jesus. When we become worried or depressed over our inability to be adequately prepared, then we are properly prepared to hear the gospel! If we're worried about trusting our own preparations, then we've been trusting the wrong thing!

Christ Jesus calls out to us, 'Be prepared! Be ready! Watch! Stay awake!' And all our reflection on his call leads us to the inevitable conclusion that given the criteria, we aren't prepared, we aren't ready, we aren't watchful enough, and we can't stay awake! And to promise, 'We'll try harder!', just makes it worse! Because deep inside we know that, no, we won't! And even if we did, it wouldn't be enough!

Are you ready for the good news? When our Lord Jesus tells us that he will come again unexpectedly, of course it feels threatening! But it's not *just* a threat – it's a promise. Don't fall back into old patterns – into yourself: self-improvement, self-realization, self-accomplishment! Cast off those old works of darkness and put on the armor of light! Darkness is an opportunity for the Old Adam to have his way – a time of danger and dread. Put on the Lord Jesus. Because when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. And if we have been buried with him by baptism into a death like his, we will certainly be raised with him in a resurrection like his. It's not so much of a 'do good, or else'; it's more of a 'don't give up on the promise! It's real, and it's coming. Jesus promises, "I'm real and I'm coming – for you!"

Thanks be to God!

Prayers of the Church

As we await the coming of Christ, let us pray for the Church, the world, and for all people according to their need.

A brief silence

Thank you, Lord, for your promise to visit your people with judgment and forgiveness. Thank you for Jesus, your final Word and the 'Yes' to all your promises. Make us ready to receive him into our hearts, homes, and world. Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and purify your Church. Make it a holy dwelling, fit for your Son. Make it the New Jerusalem, the home of all whom you have redeemed. Make it your house of prayer for all peoples. Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and cleanse the hearts of all who worship here. Fill us with love for you, and charity for our neighbors especially those most in need of your mercy. Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come to the aid of your persecuted Church. Lift up their heads; strengthen their faith; and deliver them from their enemies. Set free those who hate you from bondage to sin; and give all of us grace to bear witness to Christ until he comes again in glory. Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and guide all who walk the path of discipleship. Give them grace to listen, ponder, and obey your Word. In all they do, help

them prepare your Way into the hearts of others, especially those who walk in the darkness of doubt or despair.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord, and grant your Spirit to the leaders of the nations. Give them wisdom, humility, prudence, and integrity. Remind them that they must give an account of their stewardship of authority to you, the Lord of the nations and their King and God.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord; and banish violence, injustice, and hatred from this death-shadowed world. Give your Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might to all who stand in harm's way on our behalf. Grant success to all they do that serves your will. Restore them to their loved ones, and speed the day when they may serve you in peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord; and bring healing and hope to all whose need is great. Especially we lift before you Pr. David Andreae, Amy Cooper, Claire Littlefield, Pr. James Puotyual, Dallas Rathe, Delores Rodela, and the VansCoy family. Deliver them from all that darkens their lives. Give patience, gentleness, and respite to caregivers, and shine the light of your love upon us all.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**

Stir up your power, O Lord; and raise from the shadows of death all who have fallen asleep in you. Help us to comfort those who grieve in this season of feasting and joy. Give us grace to be children of the day, filled with the light of your love. Help us to encourage one another in steadfast faith and deeds of charity until Jesus returns in glory. Then, by your mercy, bring us safely into your eternal Kingdom, which you have prepared for all whom you have redeemed.

Lord, in your mercy, **please hear our prayer.**