

Sunday Sermon November 30, 2025

Welcome to Advent. Advent is the four week season before Christmas when we light the candles of our wreath and prepare for Christ's birth. Advent means "coming" and our Gospel reading makes this very clear. The word "coming" appears 5 times in 8 short verses.

Advent is about God's threefold "coming." Threefold. Today's Gospel, with its apocalyptic images, speaks of Christ's Second Coming. His coming at the end of time. Our opening collect speaks of this when it says that Christ will come "in the last day... to judge both the living and the dead..." Christ coming at the end.

Advent is also a time when we prepare for Christ's coming at Christmas, when we remember God taking flesh and coming into the world as the child of Bethlehem, born of Mary, visited by shepherds, laid in a manger.

And we always celebrate God's "in-between" comings. The ways we see and know Emmanuel – God with us – from day to day in our lives here and now.

So Advent celebrates the threefold comings of God in Christ: At the beginning when we remember his birth in a stable long ago, and at the end when we experience His coming again, and all the ways that God comes "in-between" through ordinary acts of loving kindness, simple gifts of bread and wine, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and all the everyday opportunities we have to seek and serve Christ in all persons by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Now I don't know about you, but I love two of those three Advent "comings." I love Christmas, and preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth, the decorations, the full church services, the music. We will hold candles in our darkened church while the Christmas story is read and then we will sing "Silent Night." I get excited just thinking about it.

God in the flesh – love in the flesh – coming into our world on a dark, starry night, visited by humble shepherds. The story stirs minds and hearts. It takes

me back to Christmas pageants and late night services, candles, and smell of evergreen hanging in the air.

And I also love God's many "in-between" comings. Knowing and trusting that God comes among us all the time, in our lives here and now, sometimes in unexpected ways, at unexpected times, Jesus can even show up, as Mother Theresa said, "in his most distressing disguise" in the poor, the hungry, the vulnerable, the hurting, the stranger.

We can encounter Christ in worship, in prayer, in nature, in one another, in countless ways. I probably spend more time preaching about God's "in between" comings than anything else. So I'm a big fan of Christ coming at Christmas, and all the ways He shows up along the way, but His third coming – His coming at the end – to judge. This is my least favorite Advent coming, truth be told.

I don't like thinking about Christ coming to judge whether at the end of my life or at the end of the world. And I don't spend a lot of time thinking about it, but perhaps I should, because it might be helpful with how I am living my life here and now. Recently I read a story that spoke to this.

A young woman named Brittany was living in Miami. She confessed that she was miserable and not afraid to complain about it. She hated her job, she had no one special in her life, and she had a crumby little apartment. She envied her friends who were getting married, having adorable children and enjoying their careers.

One day, she spelled out her long litany of unhappiness to her mother over lunch. When she returned to her apartment, she encountered a masked intruder. He pointed a gun at her and demanded money. She was terrified. She had no money but offered him her debit card, her computer, anything. Then she waited, waited for the intruder to determine how this would play out.

She wrote: "In that moment of waiting, I felt my whole life – the beauty, the love, the darkest moments." And she remembered the one regret – "the

unfinished business I had with this life of mine. My mother would always think of our conversation and believe that her only child had died a miserable person, unfulfilled and greatly at odds with life.

That is what brought tears to my eyes. I realized what a beautiful life I had. I just hadn't always appreciated it... I'm sorry, mom" I thought.

And then the intruder turned and ran. "A meaningless act of violence" her family and friends said when they heard about what happened. But Brittany disagrees. She said: "Every day, have the ability to decide: is my story going to be about anger, fear and unhappiness, or can my story be about peace, forgiveness, and walking a new path of gratitude and compassion? It is only by God's grace that I am able to locate those virtues at all, but they are there, bubbling along like an underground stream beneath the stony ground of my heart."

Faced with the prospect of her earthly life coming to an end, Brittany had a change of heart, a conversion. She realized that she needed to let go of some things in order to live with gratitude, compassion and love. She had the opportunity to change her story, and to write a different one.

A few years ago I had a funeral for an absolutely wonderful man who had 3 children. Each of the kids spoke beautifully of their father during the service. Someone came up to me at the reception and said: "boy, I sure hope my kids say nice things like that about me at my funeral." And I simply said: "well, you still have time." You have time to write that story.

So maybe that's the reason our Gospel focuses on Christ's second coming at the beginning of Advent. We need to be reminded, in the midst of all the preparing for Christmas and all the ways we seek to know Him here and now, that Christ will come again, at the end. And so we need to be prepared to meet Him, and to give an accounting of our lives.

Let us pray – Gracious God, help us to never become so immersed in time that we forget eternity. Never let our concerns with the things of this world distract us from keeping our eyes fixed on you and following your ways, so that

whenever the call comes, at morning, at midday, at evening, it finds us ready
to meet you face to face. In Jesus' name we pray...