

Sermon for December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Isaiah 40:1-11

**1** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

**2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

**3** A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

**4** Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

**5** And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

**6** A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

**7** The grass withers, the flower fades  
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;  
surely the people are grass.

**8** The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

**9** Go on up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good news;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;  
lift it up, fear not;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Behold your God!”

**10** Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

**11** He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead those that are with young.

Psalm 85

- 1** LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
**2** You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you covered all their sin. *Selah*  
**3** You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.  
**4** Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us!  
**5** Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?  
**6** Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?  
**7** Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.  
**8** Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;  
but let them not turn back to folly.  
**9** Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
that glory may dwell in our land.  
**10** Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.  
**11** Faithfulness springs up from the ground,  
and righteousness looks down from the sky.  
**12** Yes, the LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.  
**13** Righteousness will go before him  
and make his footsteps a way.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

**1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. **4** For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. **5** Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Matthew 11:2-11

**2** Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" **4** And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."  
**7** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. **9** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday in Advent is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

Our reading for today does not feel, at first anyway, like an Advent text. St. Paul writes to the church in Corinth, which has been plagued by the arrival of competing *factions*, each with its own teachers. The chaos caused by these teachers was immense, so bad that St. Paul – an *Apostle* – had to reply to it. The most prominent faction, competing against the Apostolic witness, were antinomians. These men who believed that Christians could sin as much as they wanted; if our sins were forgiven, they reasoned, then it stands to reason that we can sin without worrying that these sins would have consequences.

These antinomian heretics were like a *skin infection* on the Body of Christ, covering it with boils. In the Corinthian church alone, they tolerated a man who was committing adultery with his stepmother.<sup>1</sup> The members of the congregation were suing one another in court.<sup>2</sup> St. Paul has to respond to some of them approving of fornication, while others were saying that all people must be celibate.<sup>3</sup> The proudest of them were going off to pagan temples to purchase food,<sup>4</sup> and others were engaged in idolatry<sup>5</sup> while getting drunk during the service.<sup>6</sup> Speaking of services, these heretics rendered everything so chaotic that everyone was talking and screaming over one another.<sup>7</sup> Worse yet, they had people there who were crassly denying the promised Resurrection, something Christ Himself promised, in favor of some pagan ghostly fate.<sup>8</sup> Suffice it to say that if you think your church is bad, I can almost guarantee that the church in Corinth was far, far worse.

## The Teacher Problem

So what does our reading have to do with Advent? Much in every way, my friends. Nothing St. Paul complains about and admonishes against in 1 Corinthians was *new* among the people of God. There have always been factions and the Church has always been a mess. Before Christ was born, before the first Christmas, there were all sorts of competing factions among the jews. There were pharisees in the synagogues proclaiming that everyone must do even more than the Law of Moses commanded; there were the sadducees who denied the Resurrection as well and used the priesthood as a political tool; there were sicarii and the Qumran people who told everyone that (if they were not actively trying to murder their enemies) they had to by hyper-ascetics to train themselves for a coming race war between jews and everyone else; there were “Hellenists,” or jews that were so influenced by Greek culture and religion that they synthesized everything about Greece into the faith. And of course, like Corinth there were antinomians as well, who did not bother with anything God commanded:

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1 1 Corinthians 5:1

2 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

3 1 Corinthians 7

4 1 Corinthians 8

5 1 Corinthians 10:1-122

6 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

7 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

8 1 Corinthians 15

Scripture simply refers to that faction as “sinners.”<sup>9</sup>

Before Christ arrived for His public ministry, these factions had made a mess of Judea the same way the heretics made a mess of the Corinthian church. Few people were giving the right message; only John the Baptist spoke correctly, teaching people to repent of their sins and prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. Only men like John the Baptist had hearts that were purely dedicated to serving our Lord *for His own sake* and for the sake of the people; every other teacher had some ulterior motive. Whether that be for wealth like the sadducees, for prominence and fame like the pharisees, or political schemes like the sicarii, hellish motivations ruled the day until Christ returned.

So when it comes to teachers within the Church, not much changed between the period before Christ's arrival and the times of St. Paul. For that matter, we cannot say that much has changed at all, especially not when it comes to the Church today. We are beset by easy-believism antinomian nonsense, hard nosed works righteousness, esoteric scribblings, charismatic seizure people, and would-be prophets running around peddling some new revelation (or in the case of the “trad” movement, selling their opinions as historic dogma).

St. Paul says that it is a small thing if he is judged by the Corinthian congregation. This remains the case as well, since it is not *merely* the teachers who are the problem. Bad pastors and evil theologians would not exist if there was no market for them, no buyers ready to lap up their ugly teachings like thirsty puppies drinking urine from a bathroom stall. It is the same situation as with prostitution and pornography; if there were no buyers, there would be no producers. Though there is only one true doctrine given in the Word of God, there are as many “Christianities” as there are Christians: whoever has itching ears to hear the things he wants, there will be some false teacher at the ready to provide exactly what they desire. To those who would categorically hate the pastorate, the Apostle responds with “maybe things are this bad, but who are you to judge?”

### **The Once and Future Judge**

This is not to say that the laity should not discern whether they should follow their minister. If he has spoken heresy, they do well to reject his authority. But even if the Corinthians should decide to no longer listen to the Apostle, this will not bother him in the slightest; God is his judge. So long as he goes to the Lord for mercy and thus keeps his conscience clean, he can rely on the mercies of our Lord as he presses forward in service to the Gospel.

The Apostle says that there will be a time when our Lord will come and bring the truth to light. The ministers will be judged by the purposes of their hearts, and those who are saved shall receive commendation. Of course, *all* Christians end up making errors. Before I was Lutheran, I was a dispensational baptist, and time does not permit me to tell of the thousands of errors present in the dispensational baptist camp! I am sure everyone listening to or reading this homily has held – and taught – at least one wrong thing about the Christian faith. But St. Paul reassures himself and us that it is the *heart* that our Lord is examining here. Our faith, does it trust in Christ alone? Our teaching, is it for the glory of Christ and to bring others to stronger faith in Him? Our good deeds, are they done in obedience and love for the God who saved us? For teacher and layman alike, *these* are the standards by which we are judged. And so far as we are able, these are the things we must look for in those whom we would call teacher.

As an aside, this is also one of the reasons why we reject antinomianism of both the hard and soft varieties. If a man says we can sin as much as we'd like, someone may only say that if he *wants* to sin, and if sin is the true treasure of his heart. Such a man persisting in these teachings will not hear anything good from our Lord on Judgment Day! And if someone is a “soft” antinomian, who says that the Law is preached but not enforced nor used to guide the believer, such a man is protecting his sin as though it were a *secret* treasure. God measures and weighs every heart, but those in the “pro-sin” party in the Church have already revealed it and must be rejected.

## **Conclusion**

Now my friends, do you see how this is an Advent text? Our Lord arrived in the Incarnation to fulfill all of His promises concerning the fulfillment of the Law and the forgiveness of sins. As people waited for His Birth and the ministry He engaged in, there was absolute chaos – but God knew the hearts of those who would follow Him. In the same way my friends, there is doctrinal chaos now as we await the Return of our Lord Jesus, same as there was in Corinth. One Day He shall return to reveal all things. Not “all things” as in the “secret sins” we don't want to talk about or the errant flubbing of our words, not to bring us into judgment over our former errors – but to reveal the thing which matters the most, our hearts and whether they belong to Jesus. With penitent hearts then, let us entrust ourselves to Christ who will see us through the chaos and guide us despite all the insane teachings out there. Having received forgiveness in the words of Absolution, in Communion and in our Baptism, let us stand firm in following Him, having the same confidence and clean consciences as St. Paul.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.