

Sermon November 28, 2021 - Advent 1

By The Rev. Canon Dr. Lorne Mitchell

May our reflections on scripture this day inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and action. Amen.

This morning, from the Gospel of Luke we hear,

Then Jesus told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near...

Be on guard so that your hearts are prepared...

I love this parable. It's so simple. Jesus is saying if you pay attention to what's happening in Creation around you - you can tell that something is close. ... A parallel to this for Canadians would be the fall... *Look at the Maple trees; as soon as the leaves turn orange and red you can see for yourselves and know that winter is already near... be on guard so that you are prepared.*

We certainly know what that's all about. We know the signs that winter is coming. Of course, whether or not you pay attention to that is another thing. If you take the signs seriously, you do things to get ready... you clean up the

garden and put away the tools... you set a date to put on your snow tires... you get some ice salt...you get out your winter boots, hat and mitts... you make sure that the scraper is in the car for clearing the windshield of snow and ice. This is Canada, we know when winter is coming and if you're smart you prepare for it.

Of course, not everyone pays attention, and not everyone prepares for it. Every year you hear of drivers who are caught off guard by the first blast of snow and cold. Sometimes we are too busy and we just put it off our preparations a bit too long. It happens.

Fortunately, as the cold arrives, there are other preparations we do that are more fun than snow tires. As we move into the wonderful season of Advent, we prepare our homes in various ways...we have traditions such as decorations, lights, baking, special music, even special smells... pine, cedar, cinnamon, nutmeg, sage... all part of our seasonal preparations.

Meanwhile, here, at the church, our scripture readings during Advent help us focus on another kind of preparation. You see, just as we know that winter is coming and need to prepare for it; The prophets of old were certain that the day would arrive when God would come into our midst and we need to prepare for it. They weren't entirely sure when; and they weren't entirely sure

how; but no doubt about it – they felt it was simply a matter of time.

And when the time was fulfilled the Holy One would enter into our very midst and God's love would be revealed as never before. Because this day would be coming, we needed to prepare our hearts... make them ready to receive such an awesome gift.

During this Advent season, we will hear readings from the prophets – such as:

Malachi

3:1 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight--indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Zephaniah

3:16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

3:17 The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing

Micah

5:4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;

5:5 and he shall be the one of peace.

And this morning, from the prophet **Jeremiah** we hear,

*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David... **Jeremiah 33:14***

One of the strong themes of Advent is this Only when our hearts are properly prepared, are we ready to receive the awesome gift that God offers to us.

This was a message that the ancient Hebrews knew very well. Again and again the prophets of old warned that one must be prepared before the coming of God. In the book of Malachi, God says to the prophet: "Look I am sending my messenger who will prepare a path before me...".

Throughout the prophets, the message was clear. God was going to find a way to keep the promise: God's saving and transforming power will come into our midst; but we must be ready to receive it.

In our Christian tradition, the story of John the Baptist has always been a part of the Advent Season. The main reason for this is that, as Christians, it is natural to view him as the final prophet. It is easy to see him as the last of a long line of Jewish prophets who proclaimed that we would be sent a saviour – one who would forgive us from all our sins and reveal the full magnitude of God’s love for us.

John the Baptist felt that he was called by God to take this role upon himself. It is the role of making the final announcement of the need for repentance for the forgiveness of sins; To announce to all people that the kingdom of God is at hand. To announce that God is coming into our midst and that we must be prepared to receive such an amazing gift.

So what does it look like? How do we know when our hearts are prepared to receive this awesome gift of God’s love?

Well, let’s start by what it doesn’t look like:

If you are confident that you are already perfect and righteous,

then you are not prepared.

If you feel entitled to riches and good fortune,
then you are not prepared.

If you feel you are in any way better than others,

then you are not prepared.

If you expect God to come into the world as a powerful king to praise and honour you, you are not prepared.

But,

If you are humble, and penitent and know that you need forgiveness;

If you are thankful for whatever gifts and blessings you have in life;

If you know that we are all the same in the eyes of God, and all belong;

And if you anticipate seeing God come into the world as a vulnerable child

who is willing to suffer a great deal of pain...

for your sake....

Then...

Then, your heart will be prepared to receive such an awesome gift.

NFSHS. Amen.