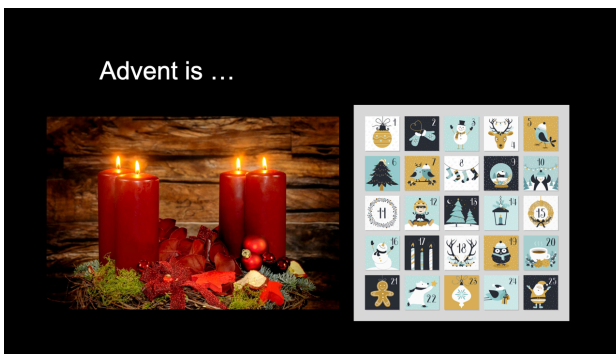


Prepare the Way of the Lord in Your Heart

Luke 3:1-6

Welcome to the Second Sunday of Advent. After another difficult year, it's wonderful to look forward to Christmas, isn't it? How are you preparing this Advent?

Now, there's a fair chance that on the media you're in, there are a bunch of these things: ads! Is that what Advent is about? ADvent? Or what is Advent all about? Today I'd like to explore with you through the words of our Scripture readings this question: What is the meaning of Advent?



Advent is...

Let's pray...

I started giving thought to Advent and its meaning way back in September when I was on a planning retreat, and I got to this question of what is Advent in my writing when...

The EARTHQUAKE HIT...

Did you experience it? What was the first thing you did? Who was the first person or people you reached out to?

For me: Sue and I were in the manse... she was downstairs and I was in the study upstairs... well, writing this sermon. When the tremor stopped, we just hugged... and hugged and then after hugging a bit more, we quickly started checking in with family and friends, including the staff team.

We were blessed and we really felt it. Shaken but not stirred. Thankful. How did you experience it? Sometimes in life there are events which jolt and shake us. Have you experienced something like this? Are you facing it now? Times when we are jolted to see the silly things which distract us and take us from who and what is important.

After inspecting the house, I came back to the sermon. And I prayed, "God, are you saying something to me, to us, to the people of my community, this city?"

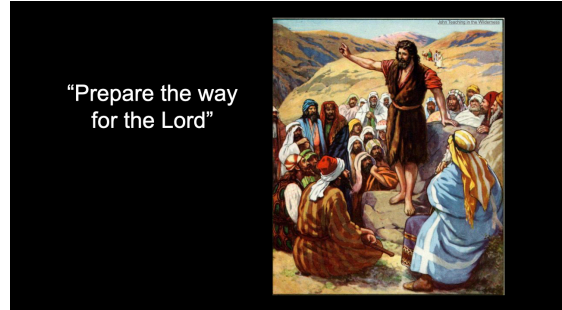
And of course God was. And of course God is, and of course God will keep on saying what is needed to us. God always is shaking us. He wants you, us, all people to receive life. So he doesn't hold back in his Word to us, his Word for us. And that Word, in my experience, most often



contains promise and grace, and call and challenge. Both Law and Gospel... so what is the Advent Word for us at St Paul's?

Like that earthquake, the voice of the prophets preparing the way is often soul jolting, soul shaking. God loves his people, you and me and everyone, so much that he doesn't hold back in saying it the way that it is... especially if people need to be jolted from a spiritual slumber.

The prophet Malachi announces the word of the Lord: "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me." And the one He sent a long time ago was John the Baptist. John went around preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. "Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him." God is coming. God is here. This Advent... this Christmas as you prepare, how is God calling you to prepare yourself and others in your life?

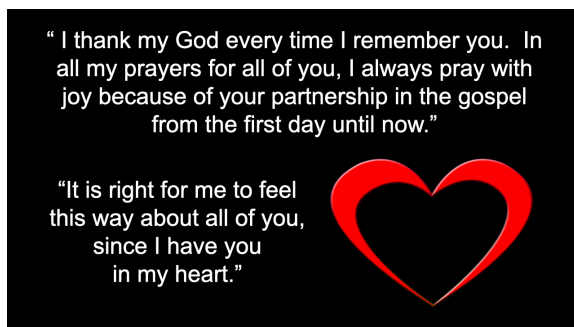


Don't let Advent and Christmas be consumed by consuming or things which distract.

Advent literally means coming; Christ, the Saviour of the world coming. Stop for a moment and take that in. Christ, the Saviour of the world, coming amongst us. Advent calls us to repent, to turn anew to look for, to look with expectant focus to receive the Saviour, especially for this human life, which brings so often the unexpected jolts and hurts and disappointments and dry and hard and lonely wilderness. Jesus comes to us to be with us in and through all that is. Prepare the way in your heart and in your life.

And how might we do this? Let's begin to explore a few spiritual preparations...

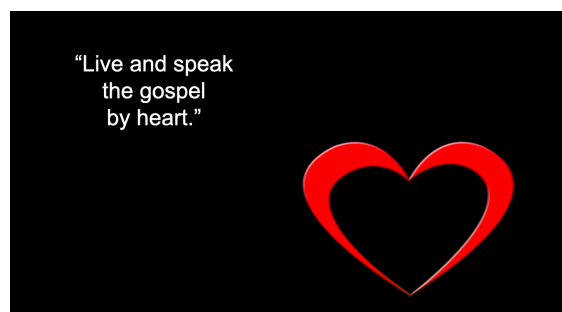
1. Advent calls us to prayer, and to loving others, as Paul announces to the Philippians: "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." And later he says, "It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart."



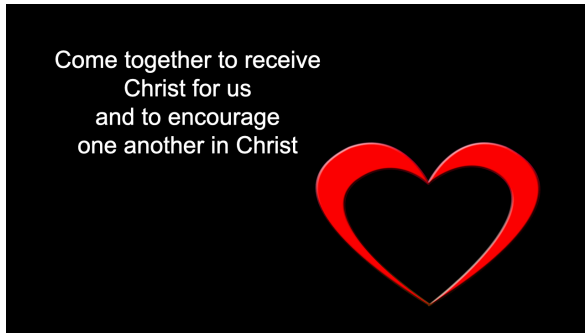
Pray for one another. Listen with your heart to people in our congregation, our staff, our Council, for God's Church. Please pray for the people we are called to serve, for the people in your heart, that they too will repent and turn anew to Jesus. Pray that we together can and will lead by love, and

be known for our love as Jesus' disciples.

2. Be people who hear the Word of God, and be ready as the Spirit prompts you to share it, to share your faith and the reason for your hope, from your heart, with the people in your heart. I am struck by the struggle our society and our church, which seems to face so much difference and struggle to work through difference together in love. So, let us spiritually partner and major in partnering in the gospel, and living it out together. We are the Church together. Remember we don't go to Church. WE are the Church!



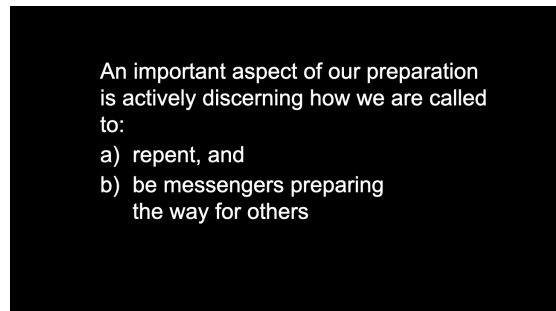
- 3. Look to the coming one by looking beyond the Christmas trimmings to people in need: physical, financial, emotional, spiritual need, including our Care and Justice focus through Advent. Perhaps there is someone God is calling you to be close to; to give your time and your attention to. To be there for.
- 4. Come together to receive Christ for us and to encourage one another in Christ. As you are able,



please come to worship, to be met by the God who saves. What is God saying to you about your spiritual preparation and practices? Community worship is vital to the body of Christ, and especially in these times. Come together, too, to make decisions at the Special General Meeting. Please read the materials and prepare. Pray for the guidance of Jesus by the Spirit, as we consider major and difficult decisions to decide upon together as the body of Christ.

It seems to me that an important aspect of our preparation is actively discerning how we are called to both to

- a) repent, and
- b) to be messengers preparing the way for others.



Last Sunday Pastor Nathan reminded us that COVID meant that the Church has left the building, but God will never leave the Church; his people, whom he loves so dearly... you and me.

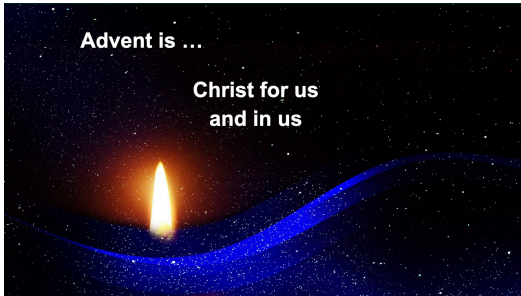
So, let's be the Church which prepares the way for people who don't know Jesus. Paul says, "In all my prayers for all of you, I pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." I thank God that these words of Paul are for us



now. They are words both of preparation and of promise. God will carry on his loving work to completion. And what I'd like to affirm you in, are particularly Paul's words: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." And later he says, "And this is my prayer for you: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best." Here is God's messenger call to follow where he leads in a

mission of love from God's heart. That by our words, our actions, our lives, that God uses us to bring his word of promise and challenge; Law, and above all, good news.

We know well that Christmas and Advent are not foremost about ads and spending, are they! And if they are for you, expect God to shake your tree, like that earthquake did a few months back for me. Advent is preparing our hearts for Jesus, who comes to bring God's life. God's Word of promise and grace in the coming of Jesus. And God's Word of call and challenge as he says to us, his Church, to receive the message and to be the messengers... to show and bring God's heart of love to the world he so dearly loves.



“Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” By the Holy Spirit in and through us, let every valley be filled in, and every mountain made low. The crooked roads will become straight, the rough ways made smooth. And all people will see God's salvation in Christ in you and me. For in Christ, here is the heart of God for the world. Advent is... Christ for us and in us. Amen.

Video of the service including the above sermon: <https://youtu.be/KV5WCVqZcsg>