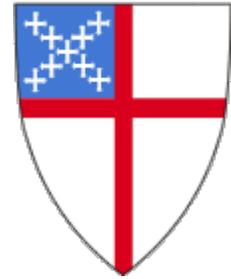


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the  
**Second Sunday of Advent**

Year A  
RCL



Isaiah 11:1-10 Romans 15:4-13 Matthew 3:1-12 Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

Sermon preached on Sunday, December 4, 2016  
St. Martins Episcopal Church, Ellisville, Missouri  
The Reverend Chester Hines, Jr., Deacon

Three weeks from today; it's getting very close. All of the anticipation, excitement, food, fun and fellowship will come to a climax. Family and friends will gather and begin to celebrate the Christmas Season. For the children and all of the children at heart, our happiness and glee will be exposed, laid bare for all to see and witness. The smiles and the tears; the hugs and kisses from those who have gathered from far and near will leave a memory to last a lifetime in our hearts. Truly this is a magnificent time of the year. In order to get here, some of us began planning on December 26, 2015; taking advantage of the great sales and reduced clearance items. We assessed what worked best in 2015 in order to make Christmas 2016 a more perfect experience. Very truly we put a great deal of time and expense in planning for our biggest holiday season.

With all of our planning and preparation it is important for us to remember the real purpose of our advent season. If you follow the media and the marketing experts, this is a time of preparation only for the secular community. But for the followers and believers of Jesus Christ, this is a time of preparation for God coming to us in human form. Holy Mary will give birth to Jesus in the manger; and our opportunity for a new life with Christ begins. The birth of Jesus Christ is the reason Christians celebrate the Christmas Season. Advent is a time for us to prepare ourselves for the great gift we are about to receive.

You know, on Christmas day, we get cleaned up and we primp ourselves, put on our best holiday fashion, make ourselves look as good as we can to meet the outside world on Christmas Day. We want to look our best in our holiday fashion. We want to make a good holiday impression.

But our gospel lesson this morning mentions none of these preparations as being vital, necessary or important in preparing for what is to come. John the Baptist calls our attention to one important preparation we must all make if we are to be ready for the gift we will receive in the birth of Jesus Christ; that preparation being REPENTANCE.

As the gospel lesson taught us last week we are to be prepared for we do not know the day, nor the hour, nor the time when we will meet Jesus and we must be prepared for his arrival. When He comes, God will judge us for the way we have lived our lives. John is telling us that preparation calls us to take stock of the sins we have committed, large and small. He tells us to do an honest appraisal of our shortcomings; even though he is not here in physical form today,

John is still telling us we live in a sinful world. It is not possible to function in today's society without sin touching and impacting our lives.

We live in a world filled with the sin of "isms". Whether we are directly, indirectly or feel we are not involved at all the fact of the matter is we all share the blame and carry the burden of the sins of the sexism that exists in our community; of the homophobia that exists in our community; of the homelessness that exists in our community; of the racism that exists in our community; of the child and spousal abuse that exists in our community; of the heroin epidemic that exists in our community and this list could go on and on.

When the aristocratic Sadducees and the middle class business people, the Pharisees present themselves for baptism, John makes it clear no one will be exempt when Christ comes; all will be judged when the Lord comes. Both you and I will have to stand before the Lord and account for our acts and actions. That is why this gospel lesson is so important at this time of year, the beginning of a new year in our church life. We have an opportunity to make a fresh start with God. Advent means something notable in a person, thing or event is coming. Jesus Christ meets all of these criteria.

A little more than a month from now, we will make our New Year's resolutions. We'll commit to losing weight, we'll commit to stop smoking, we'll commit to stop the excessive alcohol; we'll commit to exercise more; we'll commit to be more patient; we'll commit to be more accepting and this list goes on and on. Know that I am not pointing fingers because I count myself among those who speak the words but do not follow up with the required action to accomplish the goal. I like many others will find the excuses for the words not to be put into action.

But before we get to the New Year resolutions, however, John is calling us to alter our life style in a much more significant way, he is calling us to take stock of our lives, to turn away from all evil and move to a closer relationship with God through Jesus Christ. John says repent of your sins.

John the Baptist had to be an imposing force. He was a man who wore clothing of camel hair, the clothing of a poor man in those days and times with a leather belt around his waist and his food was locust and wild honey, the food of a pauper. He reminds me of a person who maybe lives in a wilderness frontier. But the people knew him and he obviously had an effect on them as they were going out to him and being baptized and confessing their sins. And John didn't mince words with the people, he made it clear. God is coming and will judge all the people. He admonished the people, they better get right with God because those who don't He will burn like straw and husks of wheat. But those who are right with God will be gathered and stored in His granary.

Repentance! John calls out to the people "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand". What is this repentance that John is talking about and that Jesus requires? How can we avoid the punishment John indicates God has in store for us if we continue to live a life of sin. John is saying something more than to ask God for the forgiveness of our sins, to repent according to John is about asking more from God than pardon and forgiveness; it involves a decision to live life differently, to live as God would want us to live rather than how we might want to lead our

lives. John is telling us to turn away from that which takes us away from Christ and turn to that which brings us closer to Christ. Repenting is about turning away from everything we know to be wrong and turning to God in humility and dependency. For the Christian, repentance will be an ongoing journey of "turning", a daily decision to live life in obedience to Christ.

God is love and God loves us. We read this, we hear this, and we know this. But God also has expectations for us. God expects us to follow Him; to live a life that pleases Him and when we don't do that, God expects us to alter our lifestyle. He expects us to stop doing that which is not pleasing in His sight, change course and start doing that which is pleasing in His sight.

We've had a story of fire and destruction this morning; the burning of the chaff, the chopping down and burning of the trees that do not bear good fruit. John the Baptist has told us what to expect when Jesus comes and we have not prepared for his arrival.

One day two old country pastors held up signs at the edge of the road. One said "The end is near!" and the other said, "Turn yourself around before it's too late!" As a car sped past them, the driver leaned out of his window and yelled, "leave us alone, you religious nuts!" A moment later you could hear screeching tires and a big splash. One pastor looked at the other and asked, "Do you think the signs should just say 'Bridge Out'?"

Repentance is an act we really don't want to hear about because it means we are moving in the wrong direction; but if we are moving in the wrong direction, we need to hear about our sinful and inappropriate behavior; we need to be told that our behavior is in some way causing distress or harm to others as well as to ourselves. I can testify to you this morning that on more than one occasion I have found myself on a highway that I wanted to get off and there did not seem to be an exit. The old pastors were even standing there with the warning signs but I ignored them. Traveling that highway became a challenge and burden. It wasn't until I stopped in the middle of the road and asked myself the powerful and penetrating question, "how did I get here?" Those five words opened the door that allowed me to assess and determine what I needed to do in order to move from that highway to a highway with better scenery and much, much less road hazards. I altered my behavior and changed the direction of moving away from Christ to a direction of moving toward Christ.

Let me leave you with the final thought, God requires a certain type of behavior from His followers. He seeks out people just as he sought out His disciples, people He keep with Him, build on and use and bless. God will work with you if you are willing to work with God. Repent, ask for forgiveness, be saved and have an eternal life with Jesus Christ.

Amen.