

Sunday, November 30, 2025
The First Sunday Of Advent

Solemn Eucharist
11:00 am

+

A Sermon by
The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

on
Matthew 24:36–44

+

Are you ready for an Adventure?

Recently, I attended a meeting of the Company of Merchant Adventurers of York, of which I was made a member when we celebrated the centennial of the official twinning of York and New York in 2024. It is one of the oldest medieval guilds of England, still using its hall built in 1357. Originally a religious guild with a hospital for the poor, it was Queen Elizabeth I who gave the Guild its current name to recognize the enterprising nature of those medieval merchants who risked or, to use the medieval word '*adventured*' their own money in overseas trading in order to bring back goods and wealth to York. The word adventure is borrowed from the French and means 'to arrive' and also 'to take risk' which, I guess, is why people still describe doing something out of the ordinary as an adventure!

Adventure, of course, has at its root the same root as the name of this season of the Church's liturgical year. Most of us were taught in Sunday of School that the word Advent means 'coming' but it can also mean 'arrival.' Advent is the first Sunday of the Christian calendar and it has this double theme of looking forward and also looking back. We begin the season by thinking about the second coming of Jesus – when he will make all things new. The great themes of judgment, heaven, and hell are explored, and the message of the prophets is proclaimed again that we should take stock and get ourselves ready. In other words, like the medieval adventurers, celebrating Advent can be a risky business!

But Advent is also about the one who has *already* come – the child born in Bethlehem; the Word made flesh who dwelt among us so that we could behold the glory of God.

Advent, therefore, is not just about looking forward; it is also about reflecting on the past. The Advent *hope*, then, is characterized by recognizing that God has already come into the world and that means examining how we live *in* the world in this present moment illuminated by the light of the incarnation, as much as it is about looking forward to something that is to come. After all, the prophets of the Hebrew scriptures did not simply talk about the future; they constantly reminded God's chosen people of their past and of the salvific work of God, most notably the Exodus event. They also reflected on the need for repentance in the here and now, and not just in some future state.

Advent is a season for looking back and reflecting on where we have been, and looking forward with hope, but this should result in making a difference in the present, otherwise the state of the world and where we find ourselves might lead us to despondent living or even giving up on hope. The Advent hope is not about being an eternal optimist – that, somehow, one day, it will all be much, much better because

God will come and fix things for us. The second coming is the culmination of what has already begun; the redemption of the world through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ has already happened, and the Kingdom of God is breaking in and taking over. The Advent hope demands celebrating that truth in the here and now. Henri Nouwen puts it this way:

Optimism is the expectation that things – the weather, human relationships, the economy, the political situation, and so on – will get better. Hope is the trust that God will fulfill God's promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands. ^[1]

Let me give you a very simple example of living the Advent hope. Our feeding program, Neighbor to Neighbor happened, as usual, yesterday. 114 guests came for breakfast, to chat, to receive advice, to eat Thanksgiving pies and, most importantly, to make community. I watched how many of our guests greeted one another warmly. They knew each other's stories well. It is simple and yet profound. It is simple because anybody can do it – after all, from a financial point of view it's just coffee and muffins after all; serving the food, or giving away clothes and toiletries, that's easy. In fact, in the sense of the merchant adventurers of the past, it is a transactional moment: *"Here, you can have this – its free! Say thank you and make me feel better."* If all we are doing is making ourselves feel better about ourselves or, worse, remind ourselves how much better off we are than the people lining up on 53rd street for food, then we might as well be merchants. But we are *Christians*, and bearing the name of Christ, means that what we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to him.

The Gospel reading we heard today is a passage of what we call 'apocalyptic' writings about the end of time when Jesus will come as Judge. Chapter 24 contains warnings, prophecies, and parables, that help us understand how to live the Advent hope:

- A prophecy about the destruction of the Temple;
- Signs of natural disaster, famine, and wars that might test the resolve of many;
- persecution for the followers of Jesus because, as he chillingly put it, *"the love of many will grow cold;"*
- The desolating sacrilege and news of false messiahs;
- The lesson of the fig tree and reading the signs of the times;
- The need to be watchful at all times as we heard in our reading today;
- And being faithful to the things entrusted to us;

All of that leads us to Chapter 25, where we encounter three important parables;

the *Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*; the *Parable of the Talents*; and then, the culmination of chapters 24 and 25, the *Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*, in which the King praises those who saw the hungry and fed them; or who were thirsty and gave them something to drink; or welcomed the stranger; or clothed the naked; or visited those who were sick or in prison. If that parable does not convince us that living the Advent hope should affect how we live in the present moment, then nothing will! Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say that this parable was the Gospel on five fingers: **YOU – DID – IT – TO – ME.**

My friends, we can so easily despair because of what we see and hear on our TVs screens, or read in our newspapers, or on the internet; we can so easily be despondent because of all that seems to be going wrong with our planet and with our society and forget that the Advent hope isn't simply about looking for some utopian future, but about remembering that the incarnation has already happened and God has changed everything. God has already visited us, and in the flesh! God has come among us and, because of that fact, even the present moment is charged with new possibilities. And the parable of the sheep and the goats? Jesus does not want us to ignore where we are now, but to put God's redemptive love into action. *'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'* (Matthew 25:40)

Some words of Oscar Romero preaching on this day 27 years ago, when Christian communities in El Salvador were struggling because of persecution, injustice, and terror. In encouraging his flock to live the Advent hope, Romero said this:

How close Christ has been to us, and how often we've failed to recognize him! Advent should enable us to discover the face of Christ in every sister and brother we greet, in every friend whose hand we shake, in every beggar who asks for bread, in every worker who seeks to exercise his right to organize a union, in every farmer [campesino] who looks for work in the coffee groves. If we recognize Christ in them, then we won't rob them, deceive them, or deny them their rights. They are Christ, and whatever is done to them Christ will take as done to him. This is what Advent is about, Christ living among us. ^[2]

My dear friends, are you ready for an Adventure?

References

- 1 Henri Nowen – from *Bread for the Journey*
 - 2 Sermon preached on December 3, 1978
-