



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Come, let us walk...” **Sermon on Isaiah 2:1-5**

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First Sunday of Advent

Advent is hard to get rolling. We're probably too fat on food and football. The Vanderbilt fans have already come in here delirious! “You have to mention something from the pulpit.” Not going to do that! The Tennessee fans - sharing that they have a pretty good record of beating Vanderbilt. Try getting Advent started in that atmosphere.

But we light the first candle, to know it has begun!

I remember last Christmas Eve, after the service was over. Heidi and I exchanged a hug, because we knew she was entering into a season of the last: the last Christmas leading worship, the last Easter, the last Sunday in the pulpit. Sometimes you know what's coming, and Advent is about that kind of time.

The lighting of the Advent candles may bring a flood of memories of the one or the ones who were here last year but are no longer with us. Last year they were getting so weak, you knew it was only a matter of time. Some who are no longer with us came as such a surprise. With some, we knew it was coming. We celebrate their faithfulness. We celebrate God's faithfulness. Go outside in the East columbarium. Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. Reminding us of the Traveler's Psalm. “The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.” Advent is about that kind of time.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord, “I am the one who is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8) Advent is ALL about time. And even so, every moment is precious. So, take the time this Advent to remember what the Lord has done. Remember a first Christmas. Remember a road to Jerusalem - the good times and the hard times. Remember that first Easter morning. Take the time to remember the people who walked in darkness but hoped for a great light. Take the time to thank the saints for handing on a word to you. Take the time to look forward in hope, but take the time to live that hope now. Keep a holy Advent.

So, for this first Sunday in Advent, despite what your bulletin says, we'll find the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, page 631. First Isaiah was written some 700 years before Jesus. That's a long time Advent. A long time to wait for Good news. Unless from the moment Isaiah proclaimed the word, it was, and is, and will always be Good News.

Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

Advent is an invitation to live the Good News before it arrives. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" As with invitations, you can choose to accept or decline. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

It is a large print invitation. I don't know about you, but I'm suspicious of the big print. I like to know what's hidden in the small print. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." Sounds like a walk in the park. "He walks with me, and he talks with me, while the dew is still fresh on the roses." I like the sound of that.

Unless it isn't about that.

The Lord has a way of luring us in with the big print. "Abram, I'll make of you and Sarai a great nation. You'll have as many children as the stars in the sky. Left out that promise wasn't going to start happening until you're 99 years old. Left out that I'm going to have you take your firstborn up a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice, just as a test." Doesn't say any of that! I'd be leery of the big print.

Like when God said, "Go to the Promised Land."

I'd have some questions: "What about the Egyptians? They have an army! When we get to the sea, are there boats, and how many? And does it always have to be women and children first? When my life is on the line, I vote for survival of the fittest. How are we going to eat in the desert? What are we going to drink? How far is it?"

When the Lord says, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people?" Know that somewhere down the line, the fishing expedition is going to turn into "take up your cross and follow me." It's not a big fishing trip! Get the details! But wait, what? A cross?

Come! Let us walk in the light of the Lord!

It's a call to ministry, but it is aimed at people who are already in ministry, but they're not doing ministry. It's aimed at the people of God, except they're not acting as people of God. It's like being on the field in the fourth quarter, and the coach says, "Come on now, let's go out there and play some football." And how does the team respond? "Well, coach, we've been on the field for three quarters, wearing a uniform. Getting the wind knocked out of us. Bruised and battered. I'm pretty sure we've been playing football."

No.

The team goes out and plays football because whatever they were playing didn't measure up to what the coach calls "Football."

Come! Let us walk in the light of the Lord! It is an invitation to people who put their life in the light. They were wearing the uniform, wearing white, all clean on the outside. They would bring a sacrifice and make an offering, but it was less of an offering and more of a smoke screen.

The prophet heard God say, "I've had enough of your offerings. I can't endure your solemn assemblies. No more of your decorating the sanctuary for your little festivals. Your hands are full of blood! You accept bribes. No one is defending the orphan. The widows' cause is never heard! You folks are just blowing smoke. There's nothing to your faith."

That was in the first chapter of Isaiah, we're now in the second. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"

Here's the fine print: "In the days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it." This is big news. It is Good News! But that's not the news you want to hear: all the nations? It's very inclusive. don't you think? It is an invitation to be part of the winning team, but it also requires sacrifice.

"This is the joyful feast of the people of God, and all the people will come from North and South and East and West to sit at the table."

Here's the sacrifice. The Lord's vision is very inclusive; all the nations shall stream to it.

And what you have to decide is whether you want to accept that Advent invitation. Does the God vision change your vision? How do you feel sharing the mountain top with all the nations?

You may not want to mingle with everyone. It may not be your thing. Look, I know. I have a few people I don't mind having them invited to the table, as long as they're not sitting next to me. They can sit way down the table behind the big guy in the Carolina sweater and the woman with a bouffant hairdo. Put them somewhere I can't see them. But, knowing my luck

and Jesus, Jesus will set those people down right next to me. "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

All the nations will be there. And He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.

That's a little more fine print. Is there a day when you could look at your handgun and say, "Well, I won't need that anymore." I'm going to melt that down into a pruning hook, whatever that is.

Can you trust a day without your weapon? Can you buy into the vision, or do you need to hold on to your vision?

You remember when Jesus told the disciples to go out two by two and take nothing with them, just the Word of the Lord. Do you think they did that? I don't know if they did that. Because in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to his disciples, "There's going to be trouble! You're going to deny me, and it's going to get rough out there." And His disciples said, "Don't worry, here are two swords." What? "Enough! Enough!," says the Lord. Who told you about swords?

The invitation is to walk in the light of the Lord. It's so hard to trust the vision. You remember when the Church was brand spanking new? Pentecost, the wind, the fire, the speaking in tongues. Everyone was on the same page. People were cut to the heart with the sword of the Gospel. Thousands were baptized. And the Lord added to their number day to day. And they divided everything between them as anyone had need. Except for Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), who kept a little rainy-day fund in case this Jesus-thing didn't pan out. It didn't end well for them.

Advent is an invitation to "Come! Let us walk in the light of the Lord." It's an invitation to align our lives with the one who was, and is, and is to come. It's an invitation to put all the stuff in this world that, when it is all said and done, doesn't amount to a hill of beans, and invest our lives in light, eternity, and all the things that are beautiful.

As I was driving in the cold rain this morning, for some reason, I thought about Dr. Tom Graham. It was about this time of year, back in 2010 or 2011, when our church was still engaged in flood relief, I mentioned a woman who needed a new roof. And on a day like today, tarps and buckets were all over her house, and can you imagine what it was like to live like that? And after the service, Tom came up to me and said, "How much for the roof?" And I said, "Tom, look, I'm just preaching here." Sending up a little smoke on Sunday morning.... "How much for a roof?" He bought a roof. And on this day and in this weather, there is a home that now has a 15-year-old roof; I pray it doesn't leak. But there's a roof, and there's Good News.

I remember Tom Graham, who was and is and still is coming. The Good News is always coming. And that's Advent. Amen.