

Advent is always an exciting time. It's a time of anticipation, a time of looking forward to what is to come. But unfortunately, Advent often get swallowed up by Christmas, so that we focus more on Christmas than on this season. Advent become something of a countdown, looking forward to Christmas Day. You even see this out in the world with Advent calendars counting down to the 25th, filled with candies or food or drink or whatever it may be. Now, I know that many are excited for Christmas, and that's good. We should be excited for the birth of our Savior. But Advent is more than just the days before Christmas. Advent is a time where we meet God. It is the time for preparing to meet him in all the different ways that he comes. Not just at Bethlehem long ago, and not just on the Last Day when he will come again, but rather also today as he comes to us. Will we be ready to meet him when he comes?

And Christians, we do need to be ready. And we should not think of it as something far off or something that just might happen. God meets us here in this place, here on this day. Because we have come into the presence of the living God. Jesus himself says that where two or three are gathered in his name, just as we are gathered today, God is present there among them. We have come before his throne with our prayers and our praises. God comes to us today through his Word, so that the words that we here are the very voice of the living God. God comes to us through his Sacraments, where he meets us and brings us forgiveness. God comes to us through prayer, when we come to him asking him for whatever we want. God comes to us when we wake up. He comes to us when we lie down. He meets us in all of these different ways. So will we be ready to meet him when he comes?

And that's not something that we should take lightly, Christians. I know that we may not think all that much about it to come into the presence of God. It might be just habit for us, habit to come here on Sunday morning, habit to pray during the day, whatever it may be. Those are good habits to have, certainly. But God is more than just a habit. God does not come to us just in ordinary ways. The God who comes is our mighty, living Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. As David says in our Psalm for today: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." So David tells us: the world belongs to God. The mountains and the hills, the sea and the sky, all of it and all that is in it belongs to the Lord. The creatures of the world belong to him. All the nations of the world belong to him. You belong to him. Why? Because he has made all of them. They are the work of his hands. And just as the things that I make are mine because I made them, so also all the things of this creation are God's because he made them. The God who comes to you today is your Lord and Master, the one who made you, your Creator. And he comes to claim you as his own. Will you be ready for him when he comes?

If that doesn't make you tremble, Christians, think of his great power, what David shows us in this Psalm. God created the entire world. Everything exists because of him. Who are we in comparison with that? And God did not create the world by just putting things together, the way that we make things, shaping materials into something else. No, God created the world simply by speaking. With a word, God laid the foundations of the earth. With a word, God set the stars in their place. With a word, God called all creatures into existence. Could you do that? Could you shape reality simply by speaking? Could you command the sun to rise or the sea to know its place simply by a word? And yet the mighty Creator who comes to us today can do just that. Will we be ready to meet him when he comes?

And more than this, Christians, the God who comes to us today is righteous. He is all holy. Evil cannot be in his presence. There is no evil in him. All that he does is perfectly good. And holiness like that, Christians, is like the sun, burning up everything that comes near. We simply are coming into the presence of the all holy God. As David says in our Psalm: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully." Who can meet this God? The one who has clean hands, whose hands are not stained with blood. The one who has a pure heart, one that does not turn towards evil. One that does not lift up his soul to what is false. One who does not swear deceitfully. In other words, the one who can meet God is the one who is also righteous and holy, not only toward God, but also toward his neighbor. Such a one, and only such a one, can stand before God and meet him at his throne!

But Christians, who among us can truly claim to be holy? Who among us can truly claim to be righteous? Who among us can claim to have clean hands and a pure heart? Can we say that we have never sinned? That we have never done what is evil in the sight of God? Are we not the children of Adam, sinful from our very birth? Consider even the prophets when they came into the presence of God. Isaiah saw the feet of God, and he feared for his life. Ezekiel saw God's throne, and he sat trembling afterwards for a week. Sinners cannot stand before the throne of God. It would simply destroy us. We have fallen short of the glory of God and not even the very best that we do is good enough. On our own, we cannot meet God. On our own, we cannot stand before him.

But this same God who comes to us, Christians, this God who is all holy, this God who is all righteous, is also the God of love. His compassion is everlasting. His mercies never come to an end. This God desires to be with us. He desires to be among us as our God. Of course, he can't simply ignore sin, to pretend as if it was nothing. That would go against his very nature. It would make him something less than what he is. So he has to do something about it. He has to deal with the problem of sin. But this is exactly what he comes to you today to do. God has come to bring sinners to himself. As David says in our Psalm: "He will receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob." And notice that David says here that we do not receive only blessing from the Lord, but also righteousness. God has come to make us righteous. God comes to make us holy, because he is the God of our salvation. And he changes us. He transforms us by covering over our sins, so that we're able to stand before him today in his presence. And he does that, Christians, through Jesus Christ, his Son. In Christ, our hands have been made clean. In Christ, our hearts have been made pure. In Christ, we have received blessing and righteousness. In Christ, we are able to meet God. God has dealt with the problem of sin through Jesus Christ, his Son.

And because we have been made right with God, we have also been made a new creation in Jesus Christ. We are no longer bound to sin, to the old ways that kept us away from God. We have been made new, so that we now walk in the new ways of righteousness and of holiness. Because of Jesus, we are able to love God. Because of Jesus, we are able to love one another. Because of Jesus, we are able to listen to God and to follow him wherever he goes. Because of Jesus, we are able to be patient with one another, to forgive one another, to care for one another. We can put away the old sin by the power of God that is changing us to make us like himself. And in this way, Christians, we can prepare to meet him. As David says: "Lift up your heads, O

gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!" Like lifting up the bar of a gate to open it up so that the king of the city may come in, so also we can prepare and open the gates of our hearts so that Christ may enter in.

So let us put away the works of darkness. Let us turn away from evil. Let us love as we have been loved by God. Let us forgive as we have been forgiven. And in this way, we will be ready to meet our Lord who comes to save us from our sins. I think the best way to put it comes from our hymn: "Fling wide the portals of your heart; / Make it a temple set apart / From earthly use for heav'ns employ, / Adorned with prayer and love and joy. / So shall your Sov'reign enter in / And new and nobler life begin. / To God alone be praise / For word and deed and grace!"

Let us pray. O Lord of hosts, King of glory, prepare us to meet you as you come to us today, so that we may turn from sin and walk in the ways of righteousness and greet your coming with joy; through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.