

ARE YOU READY ?

11/30/08 (1st Sunday of Advent)

By: Local Lay Speaker Steve Page

Good morning, and welcome to the first Sunday in Advent in the year of our Lord 2008. Today we have had our first reading and have lit our first candle to usher in the season. It is all very festive and interesting, but what does it all mean??

Advent is celebrated each year starting four Sundays before Christmas. It is the start of the church liturgical year, and it is a time for remembering and focusing more closely on our Savior Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. The color for royalty is purple. Therefore, the liturgical color for the advent season is purple. We have an Advent wreath with five candles. The wreath is circular – as is a crown – again symbolic of the King – and of the crown of thorns when Jesus shed his blood for us. The circle also represents eternity – with no beginning and no end. The color of the wreath (usually made of evergreens) is green – symbolic of life. We remember the birth – when God sent His Son to earth to become man. We light candles each Advent Sunday to announce the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. Without light there is darkness (symbolic of death). With light there is hope, love, joy, peace, and the promise of life eternal because of the sacrifice Jesus made. The candles represent each one of these promises – with hope being the first purple candle to be lit. The next candle is also purple and the focus of the 2nd candle is love. The third is pink (or rose) to let us know Advent is half over, and we can look forward to Christ's coming with joy. The fourth candle is again the royal purple color and promises peace. As the candles have burned each week, we will notice there has been created a type of stair step arrangement leading up to the anticipated glorious day of celebration. Finally, the last center candle (white – representing purity) is lit on

Christmas (or Christmas Eve) to announce the birth - and even more importantly - to remember the promise that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Advent is also a time to prayerfully focus our attention on Christ again. Yes, in undoubtedly the busiest season of the year, we need to slow down, realize, and remember what the true meaning of Christmas is all about. We are supposed to continually remain in tune with God - doing His will, praying continuously, and in all circumstances giving thanks. But the year has been long - - - . If you are like me, more than once we have failed to do what we should and intended to do. We have fallen far short of what God would have us be.

It is time to stop and ask ourselves - Are we ready for Christ to come back again - this time as the King of Kings - to judge us. And if we are not - - how can we be ready??

In our Old Testament reading from Ezekiel, we clearly had examples of righteous and unrighteous acts. **Ezekiel, verse 18:32** also assures us that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of anyone. The Sovereign Lord says to **"Repent and live."**

We again hear about repentance in today's scripture from **Mat. 3:1-2** **"1In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.""**

We can find similar warnings and messages of repentance in all the gospels. We should not just be aware of the warning! We need to be serious about living our lives in a manner so as to not be caught off guard when Christ returns. Remember what the scripture from **Matthew** starting in verse **25:32** tells us:

32 "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33**He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

34"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. **35**For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, **36**I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? **38**When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? **39**When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42**For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, **43**I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

46"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

It is definitely not a good thing to be with the goats on the left side! It is best to not take chances and do our best to be with the righteous sheep.

So how do we become righteous? Does it mean we continually do good things and follow all laws?? No!

Romans 3: 20–25 tells us:

"20Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

21But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **22**This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, **23**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24**and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. **25**God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood."

So, we can become righteous only through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul gives us some insight into what happens after we have become believers in the blood of Christ and have the love of Christ living in us: Starting in **2nd Cor. 5: verse 14**

"14For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. **15**And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. **17**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new

creation; the old has gone, the new has come! **18**All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: **19**that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. **20**We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. **21**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

This is the good news – a message that some of us may have heard so much that it may no longer get us as excited with the promise as we used to. Well, Advent is here again and it is time for a new awakening from the slumber of a long, hard year. Perhaps we have lost some of the spark or maybe we have even started to back-slide into our old, sinful ways. Our scripture from **Rev. 2:2-5** gives us this warning: as quoted from the Amplified Bible version –

"2I know your industry and activities, laborious toil and trouble, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot tolerate wicked [men] and have tested and critically appraised those who call [themselves] apostles (special messengers of Christ) and yet are not, and have found them to be impostors and liars.

3I know you are enduring patiently and are bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not fainted or become exhausted or grown weary.

4But I have this [one charge to make] against you: that you have left (abandoned) the love that you had at first [you have deserted Me, your first love].

5Remember then from what heights you have fallen. Repent (change the inner man to meet God's will) and do the works you did previously [when first you knew the Lord],

or else I will visit you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you change your mind and repent."

Brothers and Sisters, Advent is here. Let's take the opportunity to renew our focus on Jesus the Christ, repent, and be ready for His return. Furthermore, let's work at becoming the Ambassadors on Christ's behalf and spread the good news: From the little baby born in the manger, Jesus lived, died, and rose again to make Salvation available to the world. Thanks be to God!!

I ask again: Are You Ready? **Christ will come again!**
Amen

(Scripture quotes within text above are taken from the NIV Bible version unless otherwise noted.)