

First Sunday in Advent

Luke 19:28-40

“After Jesus had said this...” Jesus had just finished the story of the man who left each of his servants an amount of his money to care for. Two had done well, investing the money wisely and gaining a profit. The third had hidden away the money given him and had done nothing to increase it. The master’s anger burned against the man who had done nothing to invest his wealth.

As Jesus neared Jerusalem for the last time, the Pharisees were waiting. Hearing the crowd praising Jesus, they shouted to Him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!” The Pharisees were offended because the people were jubilantly greeting Jesus as the “King coming in the name of the Lord.” Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees clearly states who He believed himself to be— “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

The Pharisees, the most influential of the Jewish leaders among God’s people, represented the servant of Jesus’ parable—they had hidden the truth from the people rather than reveal God’s true kingdom.

Entering Jerusalem and knowing that the people thought He would be a military/political conqueror, Jesus sent a message by riding in on a donkey. Kings who came in peace did this in ancient times. However, He also rode over palm branches strewn on the road, another symbol used at the time. This was the practice of not letting the hoof of a conquering king’s steed touch the bare ground.

As we enter Advent, the season in which we celebrate the return of Jesus as well as the coming celebration of His birth, do you believe what Jesus said? Will you welcome Him as the Son of God and Savior of the world? Our culture says that he was just a nice guy; a good teacher; a prophet; a human being who knew God’s will. As Jesus said to Peter, “Who do you say that I am?”

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

First Sunday in Advent

Luke 19:28-40

1. Advent means “coming.” Into what city was Jesus coming? Why was He coming into the city? What other special event in the church year is connected with this text?
2. “Blessed is the King who _____ in the name of the Lord!” (vs. 38) Why were the people excited about Jesus coming? Did their excitement last? (see Luke 23:21-23)
3. How did Jesus come into Jerusalem? Why didn’t He come like the king they expected? What can we learn from Jesus’ entry?

For Family Reflection

4. Who or what is going to “rule” your Christmas preparation? Will it be all the activities of the season or will it be King Jesus? How will He be part of your heart and home?
5. Why are the stories of Jesus’ birth and Jesus’ death both important? Why would we have a story about Jesus last days begin our Advent study?
6. How could you tell that it was a new season in your church? What colors did you notice? Were there any other reminders in the church that we are preparing for the coming of Jesus? How can you make it a special season in your family?

All Saints Day

Matthew 5:1-12

In this most famous sermon, Jesus reminds His disciples then and now that we live in two worlds and that the attitudes and events which we experience overlap in both. It is important to note that Jesus is speaking to His followers, not unbelievers, as He talks about the different situations in which they find themselves.

Verses 10 and 11 especially assure us as we live out our faith today. Our culture is at war with God. Every day we face a world that believes that there is no absolute truth. How can they believe, then, in the Man who claimed, “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn.14:6). If there is no absolute truth, then there is no sin that cannot be excused, tolerated, justified or accepted. How can salvation have meaning when truth is defined only in your own mind? How can Jesus be relevant in a culture that accepts all religions as equal?

If adults are confused by the world today, think what pressures Christian children face in their schools and among their friends. Teenagers are especially under attack as they form their personalities and beliefs.

Do Jesus’ words begin to take on a very modern tone? He said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” Christians today live in the midst of insult, persecution, and false accusation purely because they voice a belief in Jesus Christ. In America we are yet protected from violence, but thousands of saints in other countries are not as fortunate.

Interestingly, Jesus does not tell His followers to keep quiet; to go with the flow; to give in to the world’s definition of “tolerance.” He does not tell His followers to hide their faith in order to better fit into their culture. He says right after today’s verses, “You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world...Let your light shine...that they may....praise your Father in heaven” (vs.13-16).

Being a saint in the kingdom of Christ is not something to be hidden or silently enjoyed. He has commanded us to be alive in the world. We are to do good in His name and speak in love on His behalf. We are to love the people of the world enough to share His truth and love even when it is doubted, refuted, or ridiculed. The Holy Spirit will open the opportunities and give us the words—will we speak?

Are you in a weekly Bible Study?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

All Saints Day

Matthew 5:1-12

1. What is the context of Jesus’ words in Matthew chapters 5-7? What title is given this section of Scripture?
2. Each verse begins with the same word. Who’s “blessed”? Is the blessed life one of ease and comfort? Who is the source of every blessed response?
3. When will we be fully and finally blessed? (See Revelation 22:7-14)

For Family Discussion

4. It’s All Saints Day! What is a saint? When did you first become a saint of God? Are you a saint now?
5. Read (or sing) LSB #677 “For All The Saints.” When will we be saints fully and perfectly? What will it be like to be with Jesus in heaven?
6. We are blessed to be a blessing! What blessings are you counting today? How can you be a blessing to others?

Last Sunday of the Church Year

Mark 13:24-37

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” In a confused and confusing world, it is comforting to know that Jesus will return as the Lord of glory, but what about until then?

The world is changing at an unbelievable pace. We can genetically engineer almost anything. Some countries are experimenting with cloning even people. Some parents have asked companies to clone their recently deceased children. Scientists say they are on the verge of understanding the origin of the universe, but the more they learn, the more questions they discover. Most are in agreement, however, that God had nothing to do with it—though a growing number of people are willing to credit life on earth to an alien visit.

We are told that good is evil and evil is good. Our world is a crazy place, and Jesus said that it is only going to get worse.

Into this confusion and frustration, Jesus’ words bring assurance and peace. No matter what happens in our world or our lives, His word will never pass away. He will never be wrong. His salvation, comfort and love are real, no matter what we see or feel or fear.

As the last days near, Satan will rant and rave in an effort to prevent people from following Jesus. Again, our Lord assures us that He is in control and we have no need to be afraid.

We are, in fact, to be bolder in our faith and service to Him. We do not fear His return or wait complacently for it. As His servants we are to be always busy and prepared.

Our duties and priorities as servants include continual worship and praise, demonstrating His love to one another and to those who do not yet know Him. We are to bring hope to the world. With that list to work on, there isn’t much time for worry, anger, frustration, or fear.

We need to tell everyone that there is great hope for our world—not hope in men, but hope in the power of Christ to overcome sin and despair.

Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Last Sunday of the Church Year

Mark 13:24-37

1. According to vs. 24-27 what will be some of the signs and wonders of the end times?
2. What was Jesus’ lesson from the fig tree? What other lessons did Jesus teach using the things of nature?
3. Why are we to “stay awake” (vs. 37)? How are we to keep awake?
4. How is Jesus’ statement “my words will not pass away” comforting and reassuring for you?

For Family Reflection

5. Is it frightening to think of Jesus’ return? Why joys and special blessings will we experience together?
6. It’s the end of the year (church year). How have you grown in Christ the past year? What resolutions do you have for the new church year?

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 12:38-44

What is more important—to promote your beliefs, or God’s clear word; to show your faith, or show off your faith?

Jesus often severely criticized the teachers of God’s people. They supposedly had studied God’s word, yet they rejected His Son and tried to discredit Him. Finally, they participated in plotting His death. They did this in order to protect their own opinions about the way to God.

Satan continues to use any and all who are willing to discredit his enemy, God. Satan is as busy today as he was when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness and used religious leaders to persecute Jesus. Satan said to Eve “You will be like God.” Today he convinces many that “You are gods.”

Verses 41-44 answer our second question. Jesus notes that the rich gave out of their wealth, but the poor widow gave all that she had to God.

As American Christians, we can learn from these verses in a couple of ways. No matter how poor we feel, and some of us feel pretty poor these days, we are among the wealthiest people in the world. As we give to God’s work, we often give liberally so that everyone knows how good we are, but when times are tough do we give as the widow did? Do we really trust God to provide?

We can also look at the example of the widow in a spiritual way. Do we, the most independent and powerful people in the world, trust God because times are good? Do we still trust Him in the bad times, or do we tend to take back our trust and place it in ourselves? These are questions that we must take to God, and honor His answers in our hearts and in our actions. In all times, we are blessed to give because God gave His Son for us.

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(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 12:38-44

1. Who were the scribes? How were the actions of the scribes different from their words?
2. The deeds of the widow (vs. 41-42) offered a contrast to those of the scribes. How did the widow show her faith?
3. In what sense did the widow give more (vs. 43) than the other contributors?

For Family Response

4. How and through whom has God given you everything? (see John 3:16)
5. What does it mean to give everything away (vs. 44) like the widow did?
6. The story of the widow’s offering is a wonderful stewardship story. What does it mean to be a faithful steward? How can you be a steward in your family? In your congregation?

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 3:1-13

Just how blind and rebellious were the religious leaders of Jesus' time? They watch Jesus to see if He will heal a man on the Sabbath. Then they could accuse Him of the crime of working on the Sabbath.

This was a topic of much debate at the time. Was it work to set a broken bone on the Sabbath; rescue a donkey from a well; could a tailor slip a needle into the hem of his sleeve?

These laws that were supposed to guarantee God's acceptance had become so overpowering that the shocking truth to this story is that those watching Jesus did not question whether He was able to miraculously heal. They did not seek to prove that He was a charlatan, only that He had broken one of their hundreds of religious laws. When Jesus did heal the withered arm, the Pharisees and Herodians—usually at odds—plotted together to kill Him.

The religious leaders had already decided what was right and what was wrong in practicing their faith. God's word was not enough—they had added to it and enhanced its commands to fit their own understanding. Jesus faced opposition at every turn, except from those who knew their need for God and their need for answers that worked.

Some Christians today are stuck in "old wine skins" as Jesus once described stubborn minds (Mark 2:22). If Jesus walked into a worship service today and took the hand of a disabled person, lifting them up onto suddenly strong legs, I wonder how many Christians would shout, "Charlatan!" It does seem at times that we place what we have come to think about God and what He can do in our lives only in terms of what is "logical" or "possible." Many have come to believe that our own judgment trumps Jesus' teachings.

When Jesus took part in the lives of His people, many rejected Him because they believed that what He offered was just not possible. May we remember one of Jesus' statements to His disciples, "With God all things are possible" (Matt.19:26).

Ask your pastor about starting a new Bible Study in your church.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 3:1-13

1. Why was the withered hand of the man more than a physical issue? How did Jesus respond?
2. Jesus "looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart" (vs. 5). What was Jesus angry at? Why was he grieved?
3. How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus? How did the crowds respond?
4. Why did Jesus order the crowds not to make Him known? When would those directions to His followers change?

For Family Reflection

5. Does our heart sometimes get "hard"? Who softens our heart? How?
6. Jesus retreats with His disciples. Where and when do we physically and spiritually retreat personally and as a family? Why is it necessary to retreat?