

Advent: On Earth As In Heaven ***Advent, Promise, and the gift of holy time***

Dismiss APEX and pray for the offering.

Good morning church.

As we’ve already acknowledged this morning, today marks not just the first Sunday in December, but the first Sunday in **Advent**.

Despite all of our repeated statements that we are now in **the Christmas season**, the Christian church for centuries has regarded this **not** as the Christmas season – but as **the season of Advent** – which **prepares** us for and **culminates** in Christmas (itself is a season – a 12-day celebration which begins on Christmas day).

And this morning, I want to help us enter again into Advent... to help us see and feel the gift of Advent – and why we need it.

Because I’m convinced we do.

And so this morning – I want to **start** by having us sing together a **portion** of a song that we will come back to at the end – and sing in its entirety.

It’s a song that I’m sure some of us might have heard on the radio – if we listen to 106.5 or some Christian music streaming platform.

It’s called **“Is He Worthy?”** by Andrew Peterson (one of my **favorite** singer-songwriters).

Now if you’ve heard it, you’ll know that it’s really a simple call and response song – **a song that invites our participation.**

In the first verse, I’ll sing...

“Do you feel the world is broken?”
And you respond, “**We do.**”
Do you feel the shadows deepen? **We do.**
But do you know that all the dark won't stop
The light from getting through? **We do.**
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? **We do**

----- alright, let’s start at the beginning again

Do you feel the world is broken? **We do.**
Do you feel the shadows deepen? **We do.**
But do you know that all the dark won't stop
The light from getting through? **We do.**
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? **We do**

Is all creation groaning? It is.
Is a new creation coming? **It is.**
Is the glory of the Lord to be
The light within our midst? **It is.**
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? **It is.**

We’ll sing the whole of the song later, but I think **the last line** of the second verse is such a perfect introduction to why we need Advent – why we need to embrace the season and call of Advent.

This season that invites us to **remember** the promises and purposes of God – for the world – which includes us... But also this season that invites us to **give voice to the ache** of the world – which includes us... the ache of a world aching to be whole... That this **remembrance & ache** would fuel in us **a hungry hope** for the fulfillment of God’s promises – in Christ.

Do you feel the world is broken? **We do.**

Do you feel the shadows deepen? **We do.**
But do you know that all the dark won't stop
The light from getting through? **We do.**
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? **We do**

Is all creation groaning? **It is.**
Is a new creation coming? **It is.**
Is the glory of the Lord to be
The light within our midst? **It is.**
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? It is.

It is... Oh, we need these reminders, don't we?

Because, if we're honest, we're so prone to forgetting.

Daniel talked about this last Sunday in the grumbling of the Israelites just months after being rescued from Egypt... There's something in all of us that so easily loses track of the Big Picture – the Story of God of which we are a part... And we end up totally **absorbed** in the joy or sorrow, monotony or struggle of our own story and especially what's going on in present moment.

We so easily forget the Bigger Picture – the Story in which our stories find their place... And we end up believing and living as though **this is all there is... all there ever was... and all there ever will be...**

We lose sight of – we forget – the Story in which our stories are lived...

And God knows this about us. The God of Exodus... The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ knows this about us...C

And so, in His Wise Love, God, by the Spirit, invites us to embrace **rhythms** of remembrance... to participate in **seasons of remembrance** – not just high and holy **DAYS** like Christmas and Easter, and Black Friday –

but **seasons** like **Advent, Christmas,** Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time... What many refer to as the Liturgical Calendar.

And I know as I say this, some of us might squirm a bit.

This doesn't sound like New Testament faith. This doesn't sound like the grace of life in the Spirit. It sounds more like “***the traditions of man***”. Just a bunch of empty religion that many of rejected a long time ago.

No, we're a Bible-church. We're Jesus' people. We live by the Word and Spirit... By grace through faith, and not by the traditions of man.

But I want to suggest today that **the liturgical calendar** – these seasons of remembrance – Advent and Lent and all the rest – though not something ***prescribed by Jesus***, may be exactly what we need in our day to help us live our lives ***in the Story of Jesus***.

Let me say that again – because this is key... I want to suggest that **the liturgical calendar** – these seasons of remembrance – Advent and Lent and all the rest – though not something ***prescribed by Jesus***, may be exactly what we need in our day to help us live our lives ***in the Story of Jesus***.

Yes, the Christian calendar **is** “the tradition of man” – in the sense that it does not come to us from God, but something that God's people developed over the centuries.

But ***could it not also be the wisdom of God?***

Could it not also be something the Holy Spirit has inspired?

Think about this with me.

What’s the first thing in the biblical story to be declared holy by God?

Or to quote Abraham Heschel, one of the most significant Jewish theologians of the 20th century – “What was the first **holy object** in the history of the world?

Was it a mountain? Was it an altar?

“It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *qadosh* [holy] is used for the first time: in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation.”

Does anyone know the reference?

Genesis 2:3, “Then God blessed the seventh **day** and made it **holy**.”

Before any person was declared holy, or any place, God made something holy – the sabbath – **a day... a time... holy time.**

Now, many books have been written on this topic, but let us simply acknowledge that, from the beginning of time, one of the ways that God has purposed to **sanctify us** – that is, **to make us holy** – that is, **to make us like Jesus** – is through the grace of **holy time**...

Which might seem like an unfamiliar idea to protestant evangelicals like us, but let me suggest that it’s actually not that unfamiliar.

It’s something we learn from God in Scripture.

We’ve encountered this in the Exodus narrative, though we haven’t spoken much of it. At the climax of God’s rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, what does God institute? Exodus 12 – the Passover?!

Right? God doesn’t just rescue them. In the act of rescue, God **institutes an annual feast.** A **holy feast** of remembrance – to be celebrated every year starting on the tenth day of the first month.

Why? So that the Israelites would **always remember** – so that through this annual feast marked into their calendar – they would **never forget** – they would **always remember** what YAHWEH, their Holy God did for them, and what this meant and means about who their God is, and who they are as His holy people...

No matter what the coming years would bring. No matter where they would find themselves. Even if their Temple was destroyed and they were a long ways from their homeland – this feast – marked into the rhythm of their annual calendar – would help them **remember** and **be shaped by this remembrance... it tethered them to the grace of their Saving God!**

... Let’s pause here to dig into this – because this image of being **tethered** by Advent has helped me this week.

Full-disclosure: we got a dog this week. His name is Uncle Webster. We don’t go outside with him much – but if we do, he’s on a leash.

But the other day, I was out doing some yard work and was wondering about attaching his leash to one of our trees – to **tether** him.

And it got me thinking about **Advent**.

How life often gets really consuming – and in the press of it all, we find ourselves hunkering down – lulled into a metaphorically sitting down – stepping out of the awareness of our lives being a part of the Eternal Action of God – His Saving Action in the past, and His saving action in the future – and we just hunker down... and increasingly convinced that *this is all there is* – *all there ever was* – *all there ever will be*.

This place is often a **discouraging** place... a **stuck** place...

And then, in the grace and wisdom of God, Advent comes along – and tethers us to the Saving Action of God in the Past and to the Promise of God in the Future – and we find ourselves ***pull up, pulled into place, pulled back into the stream of God’s action...***

Life a tent pole – pulled up into place by the ropes rightly placed.

Pulled back into a place of ***expectation...*** and ***anticipation...*** that ***the Story isn’t over***. And we’re not just lost in our moment. No, we are a part of a Story that God is still unfolding...

This is what God did for the Israelites with the Passover...

And if we were to continue in Israel’s story, we’d discover God, in His Wise Love, commanding and inviting the Israelites to order their lives around a **number** of feasts – a **rhythm** of holy seasons... **Each** reminding them of another part of God’s Saving action on their behalf – and what this means for them... Each feast renewing their hope that the Story isn’t over

and that there is more to come – because their God is a God who keeps His promise.

Do you see the grace of this?
Do you see the wisdom of this?
The necessity of this?

A life ordered by a rhythm of holy seasons, holy feasts marked into their calendars, that would, year after year, remind them of who their God is and what He has done.

And what He is ***still to do...*** What He has ***promised to do...***

Which is another vital dynamic of holy time – of these seasons and feasts. Not just **remembrance**, but **anticipation**. Their remembrance of what God has done in the past would renew their hope and anticipation for what God was still to do...

Which **also** would renew their hope and faith that the God of their past and the God of their future was also faithfully with them in the present.

Oh, the wisdom and grace of this way of life with God in the world... a life ordered by regular remembrance of God’s saving action in the past & God’s promise for the future – anchoring their identity, orienting their life in the present, and fueling their hope for what was still to come...

Do we really think that our life with God today is so different that we no longer need these *seasons* – these *rhythms of remembrance*?

I think we do... I think **I do!**

Just as the Israelites **needed** to **regularly** remember and be renewed by this remembrance, **so do we!**

Which is what the Lord’s Supper is all about and why Jesus instructs us to take it **often**. Because He knows that **we are prone to forgetting** – prone to forget what God has done, and what this says about who God is and who we are in Him...

But along with the Lord’s Supper, I’m increasingly coming to appreciate the seasons of the Christian calendar as a gift that **I need** – that I suspect many of us need – inviting us into a life shaped specifically **by the life of Jesus...**

That’s what **the Christian calendar** is all about – not what God did for Israel in the Old Testament, but what God has done for all of us **in Jesus** – in His birth, life, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection, ascension and His giving of the Spirit.

As a wise colleague of mine explained to me **a number of years back:**

“The liturgical year invites us to walk with Jesus through all the details of His life, and in this, to know Jesus walking with us through all the details of our lives...” (Laurel Smith)

Or as someone else has written, **“The intention in following** this calendar is to mark our time with Jesus, taking our lives and placing them in the story of Jesus, allowing the shape and rhythm of his life to shape our life and days.” (Philip F. Reinders)

Which, in truth, is just **basic discipleship**... Ordering our lives after the life of Jesus... Tethering our lives to the life of Jesus...

Is this not what we need?!

So, where do we start?

Well, we start with **Advent** – which starts **today!** [Happy New Year!]

As many of you know, the word Advent is a *latin* word that means “coming” or “arrival” – which is what Advent is all about. It is a season of **looking back** and **looking forward** to the promised Advent or Coming of Jesus into the world – *to redeem the world...*

In Advent, **we look back** to the first Advent of Christ – in the Incarnation – inauguration God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven...

And we look forward to the Final Advent of Christ – when Jesus will come in glory to bring the Fullness of His Kingdom...

Advent seeks to help us grab hold of **these two events** – and in the process, inviting us to a response of **honest faith**.

Friends, this is why I love Advent so much... And why I think we need it – maybe especially in the evangelical church.

Because it invites us – the church – **to be honest**. To be honest with ourselves, with one another, with the watching world, an even with God...

Honest about the **joy & pain** of life with God in our day – honest about the already/not-yet of the gospel.

The reality that in Christ, God **has** come to us and **is now** with us, by the Spirit – and the days of saving grace are here.

In Advent, we are invited to remember and celebrate and sing with gusto our praise and thanks to God for all that He has done in Christ. For all the ways that He has fulfilled His promise.

Joy to the World – the Lord has come!

*Forgiveness is open to all today in Christ. The gift of the Spirit is available to all today in Christ. Repentance and new life can happen today – because God in Christ has come – and Jesus **is** Lord today.*

In the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God has come as He promised and the kingdom of God is at hand...

AND YET! -----

And yet, in the midst of this, Advent **also** invites us to the honesty of acknowledging **all** that is **not-yet** redeemed...

That we who follow Jesus continually pray “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done – on earth as it is in heaven” – because, at present, the kingdom has not yet come in its fullness.

So much on earth – **so much in us** – is **not yet** as it is in heaven...

Advent invites us to be honest about **all** that is still incredibly broken – in the world **and in us**. All the idolatry that still dominates our world and lives, and the sin, oppression and suffering that too often feels like the loudest story.

Which is exactly **why we need Advent** (just like the Israelites needed the Passover), because it **tells us again where we are in the Story...**

It **reminds** us of the ways that God has **already come** in fulfillment of His promises and **it reminds of the promise of what is still to come** – that the Story of God’s redeeming work in the world – and in us – **is not finished.**

Which means we don’t need to lose heart – **or** pretend that this is as good as it gets (so we better make it look good).

No, Advent invites us to an **honest faith** that both **celebrates** the grace of God that is already ours in Christ, **and yet also calls us forward with honest** about all the ways the kingdom is not yet our experience – and **a hungry hope** for the Kingdom Come...

Trusting that **the Story is not yet finished** – that God’s promise is still to be fulfilled...

And not just in our own lives, but in and for the world...

Which is why our Advent tradition at Lambrick has always been to discern and embrace a **Kingdom Project** to contribute to together – as a way for us **to enter and live Advent** not just for ourselves, but for others – **for the sake of the world...**

And so this year, our leadership team **has all committed to focus** this year’s Advent Project on raising **\$9200** toward helping **Mahima Homes** – our missional partners in Kolkata, India – acquire an available building in the heart of the red light district, a place called Sonagachi – where thousands of

women and children are trafficked every day – and to turn this building into the new permanent home of the **Ashaloy Centre** – which means “House of Hope” – where they will continue their ongoing work of restoring and rehabilitating women and children who’ve been ravaged by the sex-trade in that city.

The true cost of the building purchase is **\$92K**, but we are just one of their partners, so we’ve made it our goal to raise **10%** of the project – **\$9200** – although we’d be thrilled to contribute more.

I mention this – in the midst of my teaching – **because Advent reminds us that *the promise of God – the hope of Jesus’ Kingdom, Reign and Shalom*** isn’t just for us – ***it’s for the world...***

Which means that Advent isn’t just **about** us, it’s about the world.

It’s about a God who loves the world – and who in love has come in Christ to redeem the world – and who has promised to come again and bring the fullness of His Kingdom – ***on earth as it is in heaven.***

To the people of Sonagachi and to us... to you and to me...

Do you feel the world is broken? ***We do.***

Do you feel the shadows deepen? ***We do.***

But do you know that all the dark won't stop

The light from getting through? ***We do.***

Do you wish that you could see it all made new? ***We do***

Is all creation groaning? ***It is.***

Is a new creation coming? ***It is.***

Is the glory of the Lord to be

The light within our midst? ***It is.***

Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? ***It is.***

Before we come to sing this song together again, let me ask you:

Where do you need this reminder?
Why do you need Advent this year?

Where have you lost sight of what God has done and the promise of what He will still do? Where are you tempted to lose heart and give up in the present?

May God use this Advent season to renew your hope in God’s promise, your passion for His Kingdom, and your confidence in His empowering presence in these days...

So, with all this in mind, let’s come back to this song we started with – **Is He Worthy?** – because this song is an Advent Prayer. A song that invites us to name the ache of a broken world and to remember and celebrate the promise of God – the Promise of a God who has come, who will come again, and who is with us in the present...

Do you feel the world is broken? **We do.**
Do you feel the shadows deepen? **We do.**
But do you know that all the dark won't stop
The light from getting through? **We do.**
Do you wish that you could see it all made new? **We do**

Is all creation groaning? **It is.**
Is a new creation coming? **It is.**
Is the glory of the Lord to be
The light within our midst? **It is.**
Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? **It is.**

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave

He is David's root and the Lamb who died
To ransom the slave
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy of this? **He is.**

Does the Father truly love us? **He does.**
Does the Spirit move among us? **He does.**
And does Jesus our Messiah
Hold for ever those He loves? **He does.**
Does our God intend to dwell again with us? **He does.**

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?
Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?
The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave
He is David's root and the Lamb who died
To ransom the slave
From ev'ry people and tribe
Ev'ry nation and tongue
He has made us a kingdom
And priests to God to reign with the Son
Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy of this?
He is, He is.

Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? **It is.**

----- invitation to the Lord's Table

So this morning – as an act of **holy remembrance** – God invites us to come to the receive the Lord's Supper together today – that with this bread and cup, symbols of Jesus' sacrificial death for the sin of the world – we would remember what our God has done for us, and the hope we have that He is not done yet – that there is more to come – in Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:23f