

CNI Sermon Outlines December 2024

1st December 2024

4th Sunday before Christmas (Advent 1)

Watching for Christ in Patience and Hope

Jeremiah 23.1-6

Psalm 75.1-7

2 Peter 3.8-15a

Luke 12.32-40

Beloved in Christ, as we gather on this First Sunday of Advent, we step into a sacred season that is filled with anticipation, reflection, and preparation. The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming" or "arrival." Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year and is a time when Christians around the world prepare their hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, anticipate His return in glory, and experience His presence in our lives today. Advent is not merely a countdown to Christmas but a season to realign our focus, renew our faith, and watch for Christ with patience and hope. Today, we will explore this theme through four points based on the Scriptures assigned for our meditation.

1. Watching for the Shepherd King - Jeremiah 23:1-6

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, we encounter God's promise to send a righteous King from the line of David, a Shepherd who will reign with justice and righteousness. This was a message of hope for a nation weary from corrupt leadership and exile. The coming of this Shepherd King was fulfilled in the first Advent - the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Jesus Himself declared in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd." Unlike earthly rulers who fail their people, Jesus shepherds us with compassion, love, and justice. Advent invites us to look back with gratitude at the first coming of Christ. It reminds us that God's promises are trustworthy. Just as God fulfilled His promise in sending Jesus, we can be confident that He will fulfil His promise of eternal life and peace in His kingdom. Think of the faithfulness of a lighthouse in a storm, guiding weary sailors safely to shore. The coming of Jesus is our lighthouse, offering hope and direction amidst the storms of life. As we remember the first Advent, let us ask ourselves: Are we placing our hope in Christ, the Shepherd King? Are we letting Him lead us with His righteousness and justice?

2. Watching with a Heart of Praise - Psalm 75:1-7

The psalmist proclaims, "We praise you, God, we praise you, for your Name is near." This psalm reminds us that our God is not distant but actively present in the affairs of His creation. He is the Judge who lifts the humble and brings down the arrogant. Advent is a season of praise and thanksgiving, for we are not left to wander aimlessly. God's justice and mercy guide the world. While we may not understand His timing, we are called to trust that He is working all things for His glory and our good. Imagine a gardener who plants seeds and waits patiently for them to

grow. The gardener knows that growth takes time, but the harvest is certain. Similarly, we must wait patiently for God's perfect timing, trusting in His goodness. Are we living with hearts full of praise, even in the waiting? Can we recognize God's nearness and His righteous judgment in our lives today?

3. Watching for His Return with Patience - 2 Peter 3:8-15

In this passage, Peter addresses the eschatological coming of the Lord - the Second Advent. He reminds us that God's timing is different from ours, as "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." The apparent delay in Christ's return is not slowness but a demonstration of God's patience, giving humanity time to repent and turn to Him. Advent is a time to prepare for Christ's return. This preparation is not passive but active. Peter calls us to live holy and godly lives as we look forward to "a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." Consider a bride preparing for her wedding day. She does not waste time idly but makes every effort to be ready for the joyous occasion. In the same way, we are called to prepare for the return of our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Are we using this time of waiting to grow in holiness? Are we sharing the good news of salvation with others, knowing that God's patience is an opportunity for repentance?

4. Watching with Preparedness and Faithfulness - Luke 12:32-40

Jesus' words in Luke 12 remind us to "be dressed and ready for service" and to keep our lamps burning. The key verse for our meditation is Luke 12:40: "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Here, Jesus emphasizes the importance of being vigilant and prepared, not only for His eschatological return but also for His daily coming into our lives through the Holy Spirit. This preparedness involves faithful stewardship of our time, talents, and treasures. During World War II, soldiers on watch duty had to remain alert at all times, knowing that the enemy could attack without warning. Similarly, we must stay spiritually alert, knowing that Christ could return at any moment. Are we living each day with an eternal perspective? Are we faithfully serving God and others, knowing that every moment is an opportunity to glorify Him?

Hope in the Triple Advent

As we journey through Advent, we are called to embrace the hope and patience that come from watching for Christ in three ways:

1. **His First Coming in Bethlehem** reminds us of God's faithfulness and love.
2. **His Second Coming in glory** calls us to live holy lives as we anticipate His return.
3. **His Coming into our hearts** invites us to experience His presence and transformation daily.

Let us hold onto the promise of Hebrews 10:23: "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful."

The Advent Candles and Advent Wreath are deeply symbolic elements in Christian liturgy during the Advent season, marking the journey towards Christmas and the celebration of Christ's birth. Adding insights about them to a sermon on "Lessons of the Cross for Daily Life" can beautifully bridge the themes of hope, preparation, and the light of Christ. Here's how they connect to Christmas and its message:

The Advent Wreath

The Advent Wreath is a circular arrangement of evergreen branches, symbolizing eternity, unity, and the unending love of God. The evergreen reminds us of life, even in the darkest winter—much like the cross of Jesus signifies hope in the midst of suffering and death. The circular shape points to the eternal nature of God, who sent His Son to bring eternal life through His sacrificial death on the cross.

The Advent Candles

The four candles on the Advent Wreath, and sometimes a fifth candle (the Christ Candle), each carry unique messages. They are lit on the Sundays of Advent, progressively increasing the light as we near Christmas, representing Christ, the Light of the World.

1. First Candle: Hope (Prophecy Candle)

This candle symbolizes the hope and promise of the Messiah, reminding us that God's plan of salvation through Jesus was foretold by the prophets. This ties to the lessons of the cross, as the fulfillment of hope comes through Christ's sacrifice.

2. Second Candle: Peace (Bethlehem Candle)

Representing the peace Christ brought into the world, this candle invites us to prepare our hearts. The cross is the ultimate source of peace between God and humanity, reconciling us through Jesus' sacrifice.

3. Third Candle: Joy (Shepherd's Candle)

Often pink, this candle celebrates the joy of Christ's coming. It reflects the joy of salvation made possible through the cross and resurrection, reminding us that the cross is not the end but the path to eternal joy.

4. Fourth Candle: Love (Angel's Candle)

This candle embodies the love of God in sending His Son. The cross is the greatest act of love, and as we reflect on it during Advent, we are called to live daily lives filled with Christ-like love.

5. The Christ Candle (optional, lit on Christmas Eve or Day)

The central white candle represents Christ Himself—pure, holy, and the Light of the World. It celebrates the culmination of Advent and points to Jesus' victory over sin and death through the cross.

The Advent Wreath and Candles focus our hearts on the central message of Christmas: the incarnation of Christ, which was God's profound act of love and the beginning of the redemption story that culminates in the cross. Each candle reflects an aspect of Jesus' life and ministry, preparing believers not only for Christmas but also for understanding the significance of the cross for daily living.

- **Hope** reminds us to trust in God's promises.
- **Peace** calls us to align our lives with God's will.
- **Joy** encourages us to live as people who have received the good news.
- **Love** compels us to share the message of the cross with others.

When reflecting on "Lessons of the Cross for Daily Life," the Advent Wreath can serve as a practical illustration:

- The light of the candles mirrors the growing hope and assurance we have in Christ, just as His cross lights our path in the darkness of this world.
- The evergreen circle is a reminder that the cross gives us access to eternal life, emphasizing the never-ending impact of Jesus' love and sacrifice.
- Each theme of the candles (hope, peace, joy, love) provides practical lessons for daily living, encouraging believers to embody these virtues as they carry their crosses in life.

Conclusion

Incorporating the Advent Wreath and Candles into the message of the cross connects the anticipation of Christ's birth to His ultimate purpose: to bring salvation through His death and resurrection. This linkage enriches the spiritual preparation of believers during Advent, ensuring that their focus is not only on Christmas Day but also on the lifelong impact of Christ's redemptive work.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we thank You for the gift of Advent, a season of waiting, watching, and hoping. Help us to prepare our hearts for the celebration of Christ's birth, to live in holiness as we anticipate His return, and to welcome Him into our lives each day. Strengthen us with patience and faith, that we may be vigilant and ready for Your coming. Fill us with Your peace and joy, and use us to bring light to a world in darkness. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. Amen.