

“Things Unshakable”

The countdown has begun. We've turned the page from Thanksgiving, and now it's full-steam ahead to Christmas. The Christmas lights are hung, and the decorations are out. Bank accounts are already swooning from the recent barrage of shopping. But even without such reminders – we know that the year is quickly coming to a close.

In the church we march to a different drummer. Though we, as Christians, are very much IN the world – we certainly are not OF the world. In fact, we even have our own calendar.

This past Sunday we turned the page and started a whole new Church Year with the First Sunday in Advent. The blue paraments and the advent wreath with the steadily growing light from its candles are the reminders for us that time is moving on.

Advent itself means “the coming” – and we stretch out our necks and lean forward in our chairs to see that which is “coming.” The season tells us that there is something to look forward to – and so, by nature – it is also a season of waiting.

The Season of Advent sets before us the three-fold Advent (or coming) of the Christ. Like our forefathers of the Old Testament, we eagerly await the coming of the Christ in the flesh, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Since Christ has already come in the flesh – now, in these days, as we wait – we hunger and thirst for His coming to us now through His Word and Sacraments – as He nourishes and sustains us in the one true faith until His final coming on the Last Day. Tonight, our focus is on this waiting for the final Advent (or coming) of the Christ.

The final coming of the Christ deals with the end of our life, the end of the world, Christ's return in glory, and the final judgment. It's understandable that such topics might cause us a little discomfort.

After all, we live so much of our lives with the mistaken notion that we will live forever. We expend a lot of energy on the here and now – so it's tough thinking about the then and there of the end of all things, and the eternity of heaven. While it may seem awkward to bring up these last things – we cannot ignore them.

These themes are part and parcel of the Christian faith we believe, teach and confess. The same Lord Jesus Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried, descended into hell, rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father – “from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.” This is most certainly true.

Therefore, in the midst of all our running to and fro, and the chaotic pace we’ve set for ourselves – our Church Year brings us to a screeching halt. We are called to simply stop what we are doing – to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. We set our sights on things eternal – even as everything around us is passing away.

Despite all appearances that things will go on as they always have, they will not. We’re only kidding ourselves if we think otherwise. This world is not permanent. The cycle of the seasons is an annual rehearsal for the end of all things. As the leaves grow old, shrivel and die – so the earth and the cosmos itself will one day disappear – on that day when Jesus Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

We live on shaky ground. Life as we know it is a fragile thing. We’re all transients in this world. We are here today, but we may be gone tomorrow. Like it, or not, that is the truth.

Some of you may be thinking that I’ve come to ruin your Christmas preparations and take all the joy out of living – but nothing could be further from the truth. The Lord has sent me to proclaim to you the joys that last forevermore. It’s just that first, I must warn you that this world will not last. Into this shaky, fleeting world, the Lord proclaims to you things that are lasting and unshakable – to call you to repentance, and to eternal joys already now, and in this place.

God’s Word set before us reminds us that in Christ’s church we are receiving a “kingdom that cannot be shaken.” Already here and now you have a share in the Kingdom yet to come. Here, in the Kingdom of Grace (through Christ’s Word and Sacraments), you have a share in the riches and abundance of the Kingdom of His glory, which is yet to come.

Not that we deserve them – quite the opposite, in fact. There’s nothing good in us, that is, in our sinful flesh. The imagination of our hearts is always sinful from our birth, and since our conception we have been in sin.

In thought, word, and deed, we all like sheep have gone astray from God’s way. Our wandering way is one of sin and rebellion which leads inevitably to death and hell – were it not for the grace of God, our Savior.

That is why Jesus, the Christ, stepped into His creation, to usher in a Kingdom which – though IN the world, is not OF this world. Taking all our sin and guilt upon Himself, He suffered, bled and died to take it all away.

Repentance and the forgiveness of sins are preached to you in Jesus’ name – and here, on earth, in His Church – all who believe and are baptized are set free, even as the Holy Spirit bestows the very righteousness and holiness of God Himself.

These are the gifts of the Kingdom of God – forgiveness of sins, here and now on this side of eternity – and the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting which is yet to come. These things are certain and sure – in Christ Jesus. Nothing can shake the Kingdom of Christ – not death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That’s why we come here week after week – not to be entertained, or to have our egos stroked, or our self-esteem massaged. Rather, we come because our Lord Jesus Christ by His blood has ransomed us for God and made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God and Father. And all this, is by grace alone, through faith.

And so, with grateful hearts we draw near here in this place to serve God with “acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.” We have no right to be here – nor do we have anything to offer to God that He needs – but He gathers us to Himself, that He might graciously give us all that we need for this life, and for eternity.

The world in which we live just doesn't get that – and never will. The world cannot understand why we gather around our Savior – because it does not know God – it does not know His Kingdom – it does not know His gifts.

The world in which we live will not last, it will be shaken, and disappear. But you have been given a Kingdom that cannot be shaken – that cannot be overcome – one that will endure forever.

With hearts made clean by the blood of Jesus Christ, we dare to enter into the Holy Place where God dwells – to live with Him, in peace – now, already in these days, by faith in Jesus Christ – and for all eternity, when we shall see Him face to face. Amen.