

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Isaiah 35:1–10**

**Sermon: “God Changes Everything”**

The Third Sunday in Advent is Joy Sunday. The coming of Jesus as a child to be celebrated in less than two weeks is certainly a “joy to the world” moment in history. But we also rejoice in Advent that Jesus will come again on the Last Day and make everything new once again. Of course, Jesus coming to us in Word and Sacrament is joyous news too. The Advent candle this week is pink, or more traditionally, rose colored, and represents our rejoicing in the Lord for all he has done for us.

Sometimes, something happens, and it changes most everything. A little over forty-one years ago, I stood in front of the pastor along with my soon-to-be-wife, Cindy. We faced each other. I said my vows and she said hers. We exchanged rings. The pastor pronounced us husband and wife. Ever since, things have been different. On that day, something happened, and everything changed. Our reading from Isaiah 35 gets at this reality.

In a way, Isaiah says, when God comes to save, everything changes.

Creation changes. Isaiah talks about the land. It's barren, a wilderness, a desert. The land is inhospitable and dangerous. It's a place where things just don't grow. It's brown and ugly. But when God comes to save, creation will change.

It will be luxurious and green. Grass will grow, and the ground will be covered with a carpet of flowers. Isaiah compares it to Carmel, Sharon, and Lebanon, which are noted for their glorious vegetation, trees, and beauty.

Then he talks about people who have weak hands, feeble knees, and anxious hearts. They are dismayed and discouraged, disheartened, depressed, and despaired. Others are blind and deaf. Some can't speak and are lame. But when God comes to save, the weak, the discouraged, and the disheartened are suddenly strong and courageous once again.

And people see and hear and shout for joy and dance once again. It reminds me of those medical stories in which a young child hears for the first time. He has been deaf all his life. Then doctors do surgery. Perhaps they put an implant in the ear. Suddenly, the child hears his mom's voice. And you see his face just light up in joy. Or a woman who has been color blind all her life. She puts on special glasses, and suddenly she can see a rainbow of colors. Tears flow down her cheeks. When God comes to save, everything changes in a person's life.

Then Isaiah talks about a highway. Back then, most highways were more like trails. They were dangerous. Wild animals could attack you, as well as thieves and robbers. Then everything changes when God comes to save. The road becomes a highway of holiness for the redeemed to travel on in safety. Those who have been ransomed don't have to fear anymore. They are going to arrive at a destination, and they're going to travel together. Instead of fear and danger, they are going to be rejoicing with exuberant praise.

Isaiah simply says that when God comes to save, everything changes. Joy will fill the land and people's lives.

***But when will this happen? When does God come to save?***

Picture a manger in a stable in Bethlehem, back at the time of Caesar Augustus, we'll find a few of those in that small town. Nothing out of the ordinary for a small village like Bethlehem. But one evening, a child is born, and his name is Jesus which means 'He saves.' So, in that manger, which was once just an ordinary stable, everything changes because Jesus is born in it. Immanuel, God with us. It's a night of joy and praise in the world. God has come to save. When Jesus grows up, during his ministry, he meets people. When he comes into their lives, everything changes.

A man who is born blind, who has never been able to see, meets Jesus, and he can see. "Once I was blind," he says, "but now I can see." And more. He now worships Jesus. Joy and thanksgiving fill his heart.

Or a tax collector. Tax collectors were not particularly well-liked. They could rip people off, get extra money by taxing them more than they should. This tax collector was named Zacchaeus. He climbed a tree because he wasn't very tall and wanted to see Jesus. Then Jesus saw him and told him he was coming to Zacchaeus's house to eat. That evening, everything changed. Salvation came to that house, and the tax collector gave away money. He made things right with those he cheated. He followed Jesus with joy in his heart and praise on his lips.

A woman is caught in adultery, and another one is a prostitute. Jesus comes into their lives, and everything changes. The prostitute weeps at his feet, drying the tears with her hair. The one caught in adultery goes away without condemnation. She is told to sin no more.

A man is paralyzed and cannot walk. He is let down through a roof into a house. Jesus gives him his legs back, and he can run and jump once again. Even more, his sins have been forgiven.

Do you see what happens when Jesus comes to save?

Everything changes.

Then, as his earthly ministry comes to an end, he comes to save in the most gruesome of places. A cross back then was an instrument of death. It was ugly. It reeked of shed blood, agony, and rotting flesh. The cross was a horrific place to die.

But now things have changed. We have crosses in just about every church, for jewelry, and along the side of the road. We call it “Good Friday” all because when Jesus hangs on the cross, everything changes. Instead of judgment and death, we have forgiveness and life.

Now head to a graveyard. A tomb back then was closed, and the body stayed put. But not with Jesus. With Jesus’ tomb, everything changes. The stone rolls away and life bursts forth again, including the life of creation God has given in this world.

Creation that is groaning under pollution, misuse, hurricanes, typhoons, fires, earthquakes, drought, and all that devastates our land is simply waiting for that day when Jesus comes back to save it fully and completely. Jesus will make it new once again. The resurrection of Christ is the proof positive that when Jesus comes to save on that Last Day, all of creation will be renewed. Rejoicing will be all that is heard.

When Jesus comes into our lives, everything changes for us too. Think about the baptismal font. Just a little bit of water, but when you add to it, ***“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”*** Jesus is there. The child born sinful is forgiven. A child who needs Jesus is welcomed into his arms. A child is brought into a family called the Church.

So, when we have those days when we are discouraged or disappointed or dismayed or disheartened or even despairing, just think back to your Baptism. It’s when everything changed in our lives. We became a child of God. Jesus came to save us.

Or think about the Lord's Supper. We come up here. We kneel. We get a little bit of bread. We get a sip of wine. But it's more than that. Jesus is present, and he comes right into our lives. The words we use with the Lord's Supper are life, forgiveness, and salvation. Every time we come forward; everything changes once again. We are forgiven. We have life eternal. Jesus has come to save us, and we rejoice.

Everything changes when God comes to save in Jesus. Open his Word. It's not just words on a page. Jesus comes through these words. He gives us his Holy Spirit to build us up, to encourage us, to strengthen us. *"Cast your cares upon me," he promises, "for I care for you"* when we are struggling, hurting, or grieving.

When God comes to save in Jesus, everything changes. He came long ago in a manger, on a cross, and out of an empty tomb. Everything changed when God came in Jesus. Joyous good news from long ago. God still comes to save in Jesus at the baptismal font, at the Lord's Table, and in his Word.

Jesus comes to us with forgiveness, life, and salvation. Everything changes, and we rejoice.

And as we travel together on his highway with brothers and sisters in his Church, we look forward to that day when Jesus will return to save fully and for all time. On that day, all of creation will be renewed. We will have no more weak hands, feeble knees, or anxious hearts. There will be no more blindness or Alzheimer's or cancer or infections. There will be no more worries about danger. The sorrow and the sighing will flee to be replaced with joyous and exultant praise. Yes, God in Jesus has come to save us, and we rejoice because everything has changed.

Amen