

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Matthew 24:36–44**

**Sermon: “We Begin Anew and Wait”**

Today we enter Advent and a new Church Year. The Church Year directs us outside of our own selves, outside of our own pursuits and passions. The season of Advent anticipates more than Christmas. The Church is preparing for the final advent of Christ. Christ is at the heart of the first half of the Church Year, and the Holy Spirit, working in the disciples of Jesus to live and proclaim Christ, is the heart of the second half.

So, Advent directs us to the coming of Christ; Lent directs us to the suffering of Christ; Easter celebrates our Lord’s resurrection. Then Pentecost directs us to the Holy Spirit, and the long months following Pentecost, going throughout the summer and fall, direct us to the life we ought to live, if in fact we have been baptized by water in the Holy Spirit and become disciples of Jesus.

So here in Advent we’re not just getting ready to celebrate Christmas. We’re preparing for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Today's Gospel is preparing us for the day when our Lord will judge the living and the dead. Today's Gospel shows us that the world seems to be going on in a completely normal fashion for both Christians and unbelievers. Everything seems the same; there is eating and drinking, marriage ceremonies, men and women at work, and there seems to be no difference, until suddenly there is a separation on the day of judgment. But there was a difference. Some were watching and preparing for the kingdom of God; others were not.

How do we recognize God's kingdom? The kingdom of God comes in two ways. First, God's kingdom comes to us now, by grace. Then, on the Last Day, God's kingdom will come with power, for judgment. These are two of the three "advents" that we think about during this season. The first advent was when Christ was born in Bethlehem. We can celebrate that, but it is in the past. We can't experience it or prepare for it.

However, the advent or coming of Christ is happening to us now when we hear God's Word, repent, and receive his grace. And lastly there is Christ's final advent, when he comes in judgment.

So, it's good to remember what our catechism teaches about the coming of God's kingdom. **“How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity”** (Small Catechism, Second Petition). In other words, God's kingdom of grace is not perceived with the eyes; but by the ears. In this world, we live in and recognize God's kingdom by faith.

By faith, we see that what the world offers to us is darkness. Paul writes in our Epistle today: ***“the works of darkness”***: ***“So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy”*** (Romans 13:12–13).

The opposite, God's Word tells us, is love. *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”* (13:10).

How has your life been characterized? Have you given yourself over to the works of darkness, “drunkenness, sexual immorality, quarreling and jealousy”? Has your life demonstrated the love that puts your neighbor ahead of yourself? Here is the mystery of Advent: Jesus comes to love us, us who have not loved, who have not obeyed the Commandments, who up to this point have made “provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (13:14). It is precisely there in Christ's love, mercy, and forgiveness that the kingdom of God is recognized.

Is that the kingdom you're praying for this Advent? Of what would your perfect kingdom consist? Our natural, sinful selves desire wealth and riches and prestige and power and comfort and whatever else brings pleasure to the self. Twisted by narcissism, self-love, our ideas of the kingdom are perverted and corrupt.

Still for us sinners the Lord calls us to a kingdom of love and mercy. How does that kingdom come? When Jesus today calls himself the Son of Man who comes in judgment, this is the same Son of Man about whom Jesus says earlier in Matthew's Gospel, "***The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day***" (Matthew 20:18–19).

In his cross, Jesus takes our own curse upon himself, the curse of death and removal from God's kingdom, and he buries it. We who take sin lightly imagine that it can be dismissed lightly. But our iniquities must be paid for, must.

Elsewhere Jesus uses this strong word *must*. "***The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised***" (Luke 9:22). The Son of Man *must* suffer and die, *must* come under the Father's punishment, if we are to be restored to God's kingdom.

For those who reject and despise God’s kingdom and his mercy, judgment comes suddenly. Our Lord gives an example in the great flood. In the days of Noah, the unrighteous were not prepared, but preoccupied with the things of this world. Are you? ***“As were the days of Noah,” Jesus says in our text from Matthew, “so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man”*** (Matthew 24:37–39).

In an instant, everything they held so dear was swept away, and there was no time for preparation, no time for repentance, no time for anything. We know not when our last hour comes. The same will be true in the Day of Judgment: ***“Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming”*** (vs 40–42).

The activities Jesus mentions represent all our cares and pursuits: eating and drinking stands for the pleasures of life; marriage stands for our relationships with others; and buying, selling, planting, and building indicate our possessions. Pleasures, people, and possessions, given to us by God, can end up driving us away from God. Thus, we must beware that these do not distract us from God’s kingdom, but instead serve to prepare us for the Lord’s coming.

Peter says in his second epistle, ***“If [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly . . . then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment”*** (2 Peter 2:5, 9). Likewise, he says that God made Sodom and Gomorrah ***“an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly”*** (v 6). Do you think this applies only to the world outside?

These basic, simple Bible stories serve as examples to us, that we must be prepared for the Lord's judgment at all times, and not get caught up in those things the world so highly, yet falsely, prizes.

How would the Lord have us prepare this Advent? Paul says in 1 Corinthians, *“The testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 1:6–8). We are to be focused on God's Word and prayer, seeking first and only the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

In a similar sermon at another time, Jesus said, *“Remember Lot's wife”* (Luke 17:32). Lot's wife looked back, longing for the possessions that perished when sulfur rained down on Sodom, and she herself perished. Do not look back or look to the world; look only to Christ, and his kingdom of mercy and love. Look to Christ who shows mercy, before he comes in judgment.



We live in hopeful expectation, longing for the return of Christ, when ***“we will always be with the Lord”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:17). But we do not have to wait for his presence. The kingdom of God is even now in our midst. He comes to us, with his angels and archangels.

His kingdom, not seen by a sign that the world observes, nevertheless is present where his Word is—his Word spoken now to you: ***“Take, drink, this is my blood, shed for you for the remission of sins.”***

Here, even now, in our very midst, God’s kingdom of grace comes to us. So, Advent is more than just waiting and preparing for Christmas.

Amen