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Christocentric: What Does This Mean? Part 1: One Lord Jesus Christ

Rev. Dr. Dale Meyer, Pastor Emeritus, Collinsville, Illinois

Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of articles by Dr. Meyer, President of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, from 2005 to 2020, after serving as *Lutheran Hour* Speaker from 1989 to 2001. In coming issues, Dr. Meyer will offer homiletical reflections drawn from his years of study and experience, both as a preacher and as a teacher of preaching, on keeping our preaching focused on Christ. This year, *CPR* Volume 34, we offer the first four installments. Then two years from now, in *CPR* Volume 36, Dr. Meyer will resume and complete his series with the final four articles.

Retirement has given me time to reflect upon my past ministry. My thoughts are many, but to get right to my purpose in this essay, I could have presented Jesus Christ in clearer, sharper focus in my preaching. And, listening to sermons and pastoral talk over the decades, I think that is also true for most of us pastors. I hasten to say we pastors have indeed presented Jesus and have not presented him falsely. There will be countless people in heaven because of the Good News people have heard from Lutheran pastors, teachers, church workers, and witnessing laypeople. Truly, we do invite our people to Jesus, who promises, “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (Jn 6:37). Still, I could have given, and I think going forward we all can give, our listeners a more temporally accurate presentation of Jesus. Closer to eternity than when I first believed, I approach this essay with the words of the psalmist in mind. He was *in extremis* when he wrote, “Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD” (Ps 102:18). So, let me record for you my own reflections about giving our hearers a clearer presentation of Christ on the timeline of salvation history.

The One Lord Jesus Christ, Divided . . . Between the First Century and His Return?

Lutheran preaching aims to be Christocentric. “All of theology has been embraced in Christology. Without Christ one cannot speak properly about God or about creation, not to mention redemption and eternal glory. Everything is comprehended in him, and everything refers to him.”¹ Christocentricity means many things for the preparation and writing of sermons, and Lord willing, we will address them in future writings, but in this essay, I invite you to reflect on the truth that there is, as the Nicene Creed puts it, “one Lord Jesus Christ.” From Arius in the late third/early fourth centuries to liberal theologies of the twentieth century, the church has contended to formulate correctly the personal

union of the human and divine in the one person of Jesus Christ.² The orthodox result is well known, and we in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod accept it.

It is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man. . . . Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ.³

That said, I think we preachers may be leaving our listeners with a Christ who is not one, but who is divided between the first century past and his return some time in the far distant future. Reflect with me. Most of our preaching and teaching is about our Lord’s historical appearance in the first century, the accounts of his teaching, miracles, Passion, death, and resurrection, and rightly so. These are God’s saving acts for us. About his eventual return? Far less, though certainly we speak about it in the gray days at the close of the church year, one Sunday in Advent, perhaps Transfiguration, and at funerals. When we speak about the resurrection, we usually direct our hearers’ thoughts to two times: Easter, the third day, or to the resurrection at the Last Day. But our Lord right now? We often invoke his presence through the Word and Sacraments, which is correct, but do our listeners know *whence* the Means of Grace are given? If you’d quiz parishioners, “Where is our ‘one Lord Jesus Christ,’ right now?” I fear their answers would be fuzzy. I offer that our preaching will make Christ more real to our listeners in the here-and-now when we consistently stress that right now, right now as you read this, right now as you listen to my sermon, right now as we study the Bible, right now as we begin this congregational meeting to talk about the work of the church, every right now in every moment of our earthly life on this side of glory, right now Jesus Christ is in his state of exaltation, seated at the right hand of God in glory, ruling over church and world.

[Christ] also descended into hell, and truly rose again on the third day. Afterward, He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father.

There He forever reigns and has dominion over all creatures. *He sanctifies those who believe in Him, by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort, and make them alive.* He defends them against the devil and the power of sin. (AC III 4–5)⁴

Think about Advent and Christmas. Christmas decorations go up in homes and on city streets, holiday gatherings are held with friends, family, and coworkers, Christmas cards are bought and sent, some even have first-century religious messages! All in all, capitalism's Christmas is in full swing. Churches participate too—decorated chancels, midweek Advent services, children's programs, often geared unreflectively to December 24 and 25. Come December 26, it all goes away—a sigh of relief; Jesus' birthday party is over. The true meaning of Advent, that Christ came, comes, and will come again, is overwhelmed by the surround sound of public culture, its ubiquitous consumerism, its omnipresent media. The liturgy, lectionary, and hymns for Advent are rich with the full meaning of the season, but ask parishioners what image of Christ they have in mind, and most will probably say, "Jesus in the manger." Historically true and necessary for our salvation, but wait! Jesus is not now in the manger. He hasn't been in the manger for over two thousand years. Are our sermons breaking through the loud seasonal surround sound with the full Christ of Advent, "the radiance of the glory of God . . . he [who] upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3)?

Ours is a daunting task. How few the minutes we have in a sermon compared to people's weekly screen time. We can observe the same about Lent; our image of Jesus is on the cross. True enough, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), but the physical cross is history; Jesus has been there, done that. Now the Crucified is at the right hand of God, "Rich wounds, yet visible above, In beauty glorified."⁵ The same with Easter and Pentecost.

With deep devotion, we worship Christ for what he has done for us, but on the timeline of salvation history, we are not in the first century. We experience life in cycles of time, change of seasons, work and rest, recurring national holidays, and church festivals, but biblical time is linear, moving toward the *telos*, the consummation of all things at the parousia. "Christ also exercises authority as the king of all things in heaven and on earth and as the Lord of the church. . . . The world, however, does not know Jesus as that unique king."⁶ Do our people leave worship with the exalted and reigning Christ in the forefront of their minds, or do they return to the daily slog with a temporally diffused image of Jesus?

You Think This Is Advent? Just Wait!

Below are some thoughts about Advent texts framed within the truth of Christ now, exalted and at the right hand of God. The lectionary readings for the coming church year

are Series B, featuring the Gospel of Mark. In his commentary on Mark, James Voelz writes:

In this strange and perplexing Gospel, seeing is *not* believing; on the contrary, seeing *follows from* believing, and not the other way around. And what is it, exactly, that is to be believed? It is the Word—the Word of him who comes to bring the eschatological reign and rule of God (1:14), whose mission is to give his life as a ransom for many (10:45), indeed, the Word of him whose promises in this story are true and ever sure.⁷

This present and future orientation can be called "inaugurated eschatology," now and not yet. The end times began when the Son of God assumed human flesh to redeem us, but the end is yet to come, when Christ will appear in glory and we will be glorified with him.

The true revelation of the Son of God was at the cross, where he gave his life as that ransom. Jesus promised a revelation of his triumphant self after the cross (14:28), when the disciples would see him (and all things?) clearly. . . . Just so we and all Christians do not see him and the kingdom of God fully implemented and manifested now. We do not first see and then believe (as the Jewish leaders would have had it in 15:32); we have only his promise in his Word.⁸

First Sunday in Advent

Two options are offered for the Gospel reading for Advent 1, Year B: **Mark 11:1–10** ("Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" [vv 9–10]) or **Mark 13:24–37** ("Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. . . . Be on guard, keep awake" [vv 26, 33]). Preaching both texts together will enable you to teach where Christ is now, at the right hand of God, his Passion and resurrection over (though anticipated in the Triumphal Entry, 11:1–10), but his return in final judgment still to come (as described in 13:24–37). Using multiple texts "is in keeping with the hermeneutical directive to interpret Scripture with Scripture . . . the dialectic arising from the side by side placement of multiple texts may result in a synthesis, in a creative insight not present—or at least not perceptible—in either text by itself."⁹

Now/Not-Yet Eschatological Frame: The two texts can be wed by the acclamation of the crowd, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" Voelz on the Palm Sunday text: "The crowd certainly seems to be expecting something overtly visible, powerful, and political to happen (logically, action against their Roman overlords). . . . Finally, for them Jesus is a disappointment."¹⁰ Where does it stand for believers

ADVENT 1, DECEMBER 3, 2023

Waiting for Christ

Sermon Theme: God sees us guiltless in Jesus Christ as we wait for him.

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Other Lessons: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7; Mark 11:1-10

Goal: That the hearer would more eagerly anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ.

Hymns:

Savior of the Nations, Come	LSB 332
O God, My Faithful God	LSB 696
Hark the Glad Sound	LSB 349
The Advent of Our King	LSB 331

Rev. Patrick J. Kuhlman, Pastor,
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Avilla, Indiana

Liturgical Setting

The church year begins with Advent. Advent has a strong focus on the coming of the Lord, and this is reflected in the propers appointed for Advent 1. While, of course, we look forward to Jesus' coming at Christmas, the propers for the First Sunday in Advent in various ways encourage believers to look forward to the coming of the Lord on the Last Day.

The *Introit* reminds us that our King is coming and that none who trust in him and wait for him will be put to shame. The *Collect* asks the Lord to come and rescue us from the perils of our sins and save us by his "mighty deliverance." We remember that God has come in Christ to rescue us from the perils of our sin and will deliver us from the sin-filled world.

The *Old Testament Reading* has God's people praying that the Lord would come and rescue them from God's adversaries. The request is made not on the basis of their goodness but upon God's mercy, for "O LORD, you are our Father" (Is 64:8). In the *Epistle*, Paul says that despite appearances, the Corinthians are waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ, who will sustain them to the end, guiltless in Christ on the Last Day. The *Gospel* is the Triumphal Entry. Jesus is God, coming to Jerusalem and to his people in order to offer up his life as a sacrifice for sin. This coming allows us to look forward to his second coming, when everyone will see him as he is, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Relevant Context

While Paul says that the Corinthians are eagerly waiting for Jesus to be revealed at the end of time, a reading of

1 Corinthians reveals several sins present amongst them. The sins include factionalism and divisions, sexual immorality, lawsuits amongst themselves, a lack of love, and exalting themselves and their gifts at the expense of others, to name a few of the sins identified in the letter.

Textual Notes

V 3: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ . . . Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Grace is the unmerited, unearned, and undeserved love, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ for undeserving sinners. Peace is what God has established in Jesus Christ. Peace is the assurance of God's favor since we are justified by grace through faith. The name *Jesus* reminds us that God became a man in order to save us from our sins, and his office, the *Christ*, reminds us that he is God's anointed, sent to do God's work of delivering us from our sin.

V 4: Grace comes *from* God *in* Jesus Christ because the Father's heart receives the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

V 8: ὃς καὶ βεβαιώσει ὑμᾶς ἕως τέλους ἀνεγκλήτους. This verse is a promise. We are sustained to the end, guiltless, not by our efforts but by Jesus Christ.

V 9: The keeping of the promise in verse 8 is guaranteed by the faithfulness of God. While we might fail to keep various promises, God does not. He is always faithful to his promises.

In these verses, there are seven references to Jesus Christ. This is a Christ-centered beginning for a letter written to people who, despite their sin, are in Christ.

Sermon Outline

1. Even though they do not look it, Paul sees the Corinthians as guiltless, eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ.
2. How would God see us when it is also difficult to see ourselves as guiltless and eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ?
3. Paul sees the Corinthians not as they appear but as God sees them in Christ.

GOD SEES US GUILTLESS IN JESUS CHRIST AS WE WAIT FOR HIM.

4. Because of the cross, God sees us as having the sinless life of Jesus, guiltless and not lacking any gift.
5. Therefore, we can eagerly wait for the revealing of Jesus Christ, knowing that we are guiltless in him.

Sermon

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he wrote to a people who he said were eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ. "I give thanks to my God always

for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge” (vv 4–5). According to Paul, the Corinthians were living in anticipation of the day when Jesus would visibly appear at the end of time as King of kings and Lord of lords. They were looking forward to the Last Day, when Jesus would return as judge and bring about a new heaven and a new earth. On that day, all wrongs would be righted. Sickness and death would be a thing of the past. The Corinthians would live face-to-face with Jesus, who had gone on before them to prepare a place for them in their heavenly Father’s home.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the children of God at Corinth, he saw people who were looking forward to the Last Day. “You are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v 7). Paul saw people who longed for Jesus to reappear visibly.

1.

But a cursory reading of 1 Corinthians seems to indicate otherwise. When you read 1 Corinthians, it doesn’t seem as if Jesus’ return is at the heart and center of who they are. When we read 1 Corinthians, we discover that they’ve formed factions and cliques among themselves. They’re fighting with one another. There is sexual immorality amongst them. They’re even celebrating it. They’re exalting themselves and their gifts. They’re putting themselves first at the expense of others. There is a distinct lack of love for others. There’s abuse of the Lord’s Supper, and they’re warned about idolatry. A quick reading of 1 Corinthians would seem to indicate that the children of God at Corinth were *not* eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ on the Last Day. They seem to be living for the here and now, just like their unbelieving neighbors.

How could Paul write that the Corinthians were waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ when the rest of the letter seems to indicate otherwise? Is Paul simply ignoring how they’re living when he says that they are eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ?

2.

Would he say the same thing about us? After all, our lives are often in conflict with how Scripture says we should live. How would Paul see us, and what would he say about us if he could see how we live? More importantly, how would *God* see us, and what would he say?

Like the Corinthians, we engage in quarrels and fights. We scheme to get ahead, sometimes at the expense of others. We sacrifice principles and family for careers because we want to get ahead. Sometimes we look the other way and go along with cultural norms when it comes to cohabitation and marriage and family. In short, our lives are often in conflict with how God says we are to live. At times, it doesn’t seem

as if we are eagerly awaiting the revealing of Jesus Christ on the Last Day. We seem to engage in a healthy amount of careless, earthbound living. Often, our focus is on a lot of other things and not on the revealing of Jesus Christ.

What would Paul say about us? How would he see us? More importantly, what would God say? How would he see us? It matters, because we don’t always see ourselves as guiltless. And while God is always faithful, we’re not. What would Paul say about us? How would he see us? More importantly, how would God see us?

3.

The answer is in the reading. Did you notice how many times Paul refers to Jesus? It’s a lot. Verse 3: There’s “grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Verse 4: Grace is given to the Corinthians in Christ Jesus. Verse 5: “In him,” that is, Jesus, the Corinthians are enriched. And Paul goes on all the way to the ninth verse. Paul says that the Corinthians will be sustained, guiltless at the end, “in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v 8). They are in fellowship with “Jesus Christ our Lord” (v 9). In seven verses, Paul refers to Jesus doing something for the Corinthians seven times.

When we hear Paul refer to Jesus’ work for the Corinthians seven times, it becomes clear that Paul does not see them as they are on their own. He sees the Corinthians as God sees them in Jesus Christ. Paul is not waiting for them to get their act together and do something for God. He knows that God has done something for them in Jesus Christ. He sees them as God sees them in Jesus Christ. Paul sees them as guiltless, because God sees them as guiltless. Paul sees the Corinthians as eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ because God sees them that way.

That’s the way God sees us too.

GOD SEES US GUILTLESS IN JESUS CHRIST AS WE WAIT FOR HIM.

4.

God was never waiting for us to do something for him. He was always waiting to do something for us. When the fullness of time had come, God the Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to do something for us. He sent Jesus to redeem us and bring us into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. When Jesus came, he was in perfect fellowship with his heavenly Father. He lived perfectly without sin. He eagerly anticipated the day when he would offer up his holy and perfect life as a sacrifice for sin. When Jesus died on a cross in your place, God the Father saw him with all your sin. Jesus claimed all your sin as his very own so he would die under the judgment of God for you and your sin.

When that happened on Good Friday, Jesus gave you incredible gifts. He gave you everything that matters most in life. He gave you the gifts of his holy and sinless life. You

received mercy and forgiveness from God. You were eternally enriched with the gifts of eternal life and a resurrection to come on the Last Day, when Jesus Christ will be revealed.

When God looks at you, he does not see you as you are. He sees you as the apostle Paul saw the Corinthians. God does not see your faithlessness. He does not see the moments you stumbled in sin, the times you quarreled and fought, the times you schemed and plotted, the times you went along with the cultural but ungodly norms of the day. God sees you as perfect in every way. He calls you righteous and beloved. He sees you as faithful. God calls you his beloved son or daughter. God sees you as holy and in fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ. No matter who you are and no matter what you've done or not done, you are guiltless in God's eyes. God sees you guiltless in Jesus Christ, not lacking any gift as you wait for him.

5.

That changes how we approach the future. Like the Corinthians, we are waiting for Jesus to reappear visibly on the Last Day as King of kings and Lord of lords. We can look forward to that day and eagerly wait for it because of who we are in Jesus Christ. On that day when Jesus publicly renders judgment, you will not have to fear that some secret sin will be revealed for everyone else to see. You will not have to fear that sins will be revealed for others to know about. Everyone will see you as perfect in every way, without sin. You will stand tall, because God will see you as guiltless. He will declare that you are perfect in every way, without sin, as he ushers you into your eternal, heavenly inheritance, along with the apostle Paul and the Corinthians. Amen.

ADVENT 2, DECEMBER 10, 2023

A Joyful Homecoming

Sermon Theme: In Jesus Christ, we have a joyful heavenly homecoming.

Text: Isaiah 40:1-11

Other Lessons: Psalm 85; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mark 1:1-8

Goal: That the hearer would find comfort in Jesus Christ's first coming that guarantees a heavenly homecoming.

Hymns:

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry	LSB 344
Comfort, Comfort Ye My People	LSB 347
Prepare the Royal Highway	LSB 343
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus	LSB 338

Rev. Patrick J. Kuhlman, Pastor,
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Avilla, Indiana

Liturgical Setting

The Second Sunday in Advent has a theme of repentance to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. It also has a focus on God coming to restore his people. The *Introit* asks for this restoration as it remembers how God once took his people from slavery in Egypt and planted them as a vine in the promised land of Canaan. Then the *Collect* prays that God would stir our hearts and prepare them in repentance for the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ.

The *Old Testament Reading* from Isaiah answers that God is coming in forgiving love and mercy: "Comfort, comfort my people. . . . Her iniquity is pardoned" (Is 40:1-2). The exile for sin is over. Thus, people should hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness (40:3) and prepare in repentance for God's coming. God will comfort them, forgive them, and restore them. Ultimately, the *Epistle* reminds us, that coming is a new heaven and new earth, which we are awaiting (2 Pet 3:13). God is patient in bringing this about because he wants people to reach repentance (3:9). In the meantime, we are encouraged to lead repentant, faithful lives. Finally, the *Gospel*, the opening verses of Mark, is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning John the Baptist. John was sent to preach a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Relevant Context

The fortieth chapter of Isaiah brings a dramatic change in the book. While the chapters leading up to the fortieth predict captivity and exile in Babylon, the fortieth chapter marks the beginning of Isaiah speaking of God coming to his people to rescue them and bring them back home from exile. He is for them and will restore them in forgiving love and mercy.

Textual Notes

Our text has numerous references to speech. In verse 1, God has words of comfort for his people. In verse 2, there are references to speaking and crying. There are references to speaking, crying, "a voice" (v 3), "the mouth of the LORD" (v 5), "the word of our God" (v 8), and a "herald of good news" (v 9). The Word of God is prominent in this reading.

Vv 1-2: God has a message of comfort for his people. The time of chastisement for their sin is over. Their iniquity is pardoned. The people do not earn or contribute to the pardon of their iniquity. It comes from God's hand.

Vv 3-5: God is coming to his people. A double deliverance is foretold. There will be deliverance from Babylon, and there will be deliverance from sin in Jesus Christ.

Vv 6-8: God's final word is not judgment and condemnation. His final word is Good News that stands forever.

Vv 9-11: These verses present the Savior as a gentle shepherd who gathers his people up in his arms to lead and carry them home.

ADVENT MIDWEEK–CHRISTMAS SERIES

Resounding Psalms for Advent

1. Advent Midweek 1: Restore, Psalm 80
2. Advent Midweek 2: Revived, Psalm 85
3. Advent Midweek 3: Returned, Psalm 126
4. Advent Midweek 4: Rely, Psalm 89:1-5
5. Christmas Eve: Reign, Psalm 110:1-4
6. Christmas Day: Rejoice, Psalm 98

Rev. Jeffrey Stone, Pastor, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Crawfordsville, Indiana

ADVENT MIDWEEK 1

Restore

Psalm 80

Sermon Outline

3. When Israel's plans came crashing down, they needed God to restore them.
2. When our plans come crashing down, all we can do is lament to the Lord.
1. But in the middle of our lament, God remains faithful to restore.

AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME, GOD COMES TO RESTORE US.

Sermon

When Hoshea, king of Israel, came to power in 732 BC, he made some unbelievably bad choices. Hoshea decided to take on the mighty Assyrian Empire. With the promise of backing from Egypt, whose armies were a shadow of their former glory, Hoshea revolted against his Assyrian overlords, and the result was disaster. Sargon II of Assyria devastated the capital city of Samaria and carted off 27,290 people into captivity.

It hardly looked and felt like what we see and feel in Advent. Yet it gave rise to a psalm that expresses our penitence in this season and then resounds with hope of the coming Savior, what we'll call a Resounding Psalm for Advent.

3.

Everything about Hoshea's revolt was wrong. He was the wrong king, who picked the wrong fight, against the wrong enemy, and asked the wrong ally for help. The game of thrones is over, and Hoshea lost—big time.

Psalm 80 is believed to have been written in response to the tragedy of the Assyrian conquest of the Northern

Kingdom. You can imagine war-torn, hungry refugees with the last ounce of energy coming to the temple in Jerusalem to implore God to have mercy and restore a people devastated by an invading army, all because of their lack of faith in him.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved! (vv 1–3, emphasis added)

Israel had made its own plans and played its own game, and it all came crashing down. They thought, "I'm smart and strong, and with a little clever international politicking—but without God's help—I can defeat this enemy, Assyria." It turned out the monster was so much more than Israel could handle, even with Egypt's help, and they were chewed up and spit out.

2.

You and I know exactly what this is like. We make our plans—which school we'll attend, which career we'll choose and the path we'll follow to advance it, whom to ask out, whom we're going to marry, how many kids we'll have, how we'll spend our money, how we'll spend our retirement (and spend *on* our retirement!)—and sometimes we give little or no thought to God's will and purpose in our lives. We pick our opponents and choose our allies—the folks we'll butter up in the office or cozy up to socially—not because we care about them but because we think they can help us. We think, "I'll make all the right moves at work and at school. I can manipulate my family and friends, and maybe even my brothers and sisters at church, to get what I want, and everything will be just fine."

Turns out we make lousy moves and dirty deals. We let our eyes be blinded by greed and lust and our hearts be covered over by anger and selfishness. We build our own

kingdoms with that unholy trinity of I, Me, and My, and it all comes crashing down. As clever as we think we're being, the monsters of sin, sickness, and death eventually chew us up and spit us out.

All of us are in the same boat, I'm afraid. We know that since the Garden of Eden, sin has corrupted all our hearts. I want to do good, but I just end up with a mess of my own making. I forget God. I'm prone to wander and to lose heart. Anger becomes my go-to mode of operation. I'm a mess. You know what that's like. Sometimes all we can do is look at the mess of life and lament: "O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves (vv 4–6).

1.

But here is good news, brothers and sisters. In the middle of our lament, in the middle of our mess, the faithfulness of God remains, and he restores his people. Beloved in Christ, listen to this: God is faithful to fulfill his word, and his word for you is love.

Remember today the steadfast love, the loving faithfulness of Yahweh your God. Listen again to the psalmist in verses 7–10: "Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved! You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches."

Remember that God faithfully brought the tender vine of his people Israel out of the death and slavery of Egypt. He made them prosper in the land where he planted them. Look down on us now, Lord. You have been faithful in the past, and we beg you to restore us. "Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself" (vv 14–15). You have heard the prayer of your people, and you, O God of might, are not deaf to our cry.

For at just the right time, when Israel was ruled by a hostile power, the nation would be restored. Not the Northern Kingdom; that was gone forever. But neither would the enemy Assyria last, nor would Babylon, Greece, or even Rome. Name your empire and pick your monster. The game of thrones isn't over until God says it's over. And one day, God's new and holy nation, all of God's people, past, present, and future, his Church, will be gathered together in his temple—no longer as refugees from the enemies and monsters of this world, but as victors, as celebrants, as those who worship the Lamb forever.

For at just the right time, Yahweh our God brought the game of the thrones to a screeching halt. Not through armies

crushing enemies on the earth, but by angel armies that filled the night skies over Bethlehem. Not by the might of a king's wrath, but by the cry of a tiny infant swaddled in his mother's arms. A pile of straw is the throne, and the King of kings and the Lord of lords comes to restore us in the middle of our lament.

AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME, GOD COMES TO RESTORE US.

By the cross and empty tomb, Jesus Christ saves and restores you and me and all his people. In the midst of our lament and mess, God is faithful to restore. Our psalm resounds,

Let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name! *Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!* (vv 17–19, emphasis added)

How amazed would the psalmist be to learn that his words would one day come to life in a manger!

In Jesus' name. Amen.

ADVENT MIDWEEK 2

Revived

Psalm 85

Sermon Outline

GOD IS FAITHFUL TO REVIVE HIS PEOPLE.

- I. God revived Judah—brought them home—but "home" was still a hostile environment.
- II. In our own hostile environments, we pray, "O God, will you not revive us again?"
- III. And our revival comes from someone greater than the rebuilt temple, the God-man, Jesus.

Sermon

Television host and actor Mike Rowe has had his share of crummy jobs. He's been able to make a good living with shows on Discovery Channel such as *Deadliest Catch*, *Somebody's Gotta Do It*, and my favorite—*Dirty Jobs*. There are just certain things, some rather unpleasant jobs, that must be done for life in a civilized society to remain clean and civilized. Mike is a guy who will go out, put on the gloves and mask, grab a shovel, and show the rest of the world what these jobs are like, while we get to remain mess- and smell-free on our couches.

Here are some of the worst jobs Mike has attempted, in no particular order: He's been a sewer inspector. A snake venom researcher—where you gather venom from the deadliest

**THE FEAST OF ST. ANDREW,
NOVEMBER 30, 2023**

So It Begins, and So It Goes

John 1:35-42a

Rev. Dr. D. Richard Stuckwisch, President,
Indiana District, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod

Sermon Outline

**YOU ARE PREPARED FOR THE COMING OF JESUS BY THE
PREACHING OF REPENTANCE.**

- I. Andrew's discipleship following Jesus begins with the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist.
- II. You are likewise called by preaching and Baptism to follow Christ Jesus and find your life in him.
- III. We give thanks that Andrew was sent out from discipleship to become an apostle of Christ.
- IV. For that apostolic ministry has prepared you for the Advent of the Christ.

Sermon

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. (Jn 1:35-42a)

And so it begins with John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the prophets and the forerunner of the Christ. He is the voice of God, crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. And it is by his preaching and Baptism of repentance that Andrew, whom we commemorate today, is pointed to Christ Jesus.

You also are prepared for the coming of the Christ; you are brought to him and given to follow him as a disciple by the office and ministry of John the Baptist. That is,

**YOU ARE PREPARED FOR THE COMING OF JESUS
BY THE PREACHING OF REPENTANCE**

and by your Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of your sins in the name of the Lord Jesus. You could not prepare yourself for the Lord's advent, but you are prepared for his coming by this ministry.

Thus do you live the Christian life, the daily discipline of repentance and forgiveness. And thus are you prepared throughout the season of Advent, along with Andrew, as a disciple of John the Baptist. But then also, along with Andrew, you are catechized to follow Christ Jesus as one of *his* disciples.

I.

And so it goes. Andrew did not remain with John the Baptist. The preacher's task is to prepare people for the Christ, to lead and point the people to Christ Jesus and entrust them to him alone. John's preaching of repentance is for the forgiveness of sins because it proclaims the one and only Lamb of God. John's Baptism gives way to the Baptism of Christ and his Spirit.

It may not have been easy for John to let go of his own disciples and send them after Christ Jesus. He likely struggled with his pride and the temptation of his own self-importance, just as we would. But the Word and Spirit of the Lord gave John the fortitude to carry out the duties of his office, as we have heard, for example, in the case of Andrew. "Behold, the Lamb of God," John declared (v 36). And that was all it took. From that point, Andrew would follow the Lord Jesus.

Andrew addresses the Lord as "Rabbi," "Teacher" (v 38), and thereby acknowledges that he will learn all things from Jesus. Being a "disciple" in this respect is more than going to classes, reading books, doing your homework, and taking exams, as though the Christian faith and life were an academic pursuit or a terminal degree program. Being a disciple does include the learning of facts and the acquisition of knowledge, but that is really only one small part of discipleship.

As a disciple, Andrew would learn how to live his entire life from Jesus. He would be learning life itself. He would "eat, sleep, and breathe" the way of Christ, like a new recruit in boot camp.

That is what it means to find out where Jesus is staying and then to live and abide with him there (vv 38-39). The disciples of Christ Jesus live entirely with him, all of life, both day and night. For he is the Word of God Made Flesh who tabernacles with us, and as the Lamb who is sacrificed for our sins and raised from the dead, his body is the temple wherein we live and abide with God and must always be about our Father's business.

II.

So, then, along with Andrew, you are likewise called to find your entire life in Christ Jesus, to follow him and learn all things from him. From the waters of your Baptism, you are called to live and walk in the way of the Lord in daily repentance and by faith in his forgiveness of your sins. You also come and see where he is staying, and you stay with him in the house of the Lord.

Hearing the Word of the Lord on a regular basis, the preaching of his Law and his Gospel, is the way and the means by which you remember and live within the ongoing significance of your Holy Baptism, to which his Word called you from the outset. His Law daily crucifies your flesh and calls you to repentance, and his Gospel daily raises you up with Christ Jesus in his resurrection, adorning you with his perfect righteousness and holiness, so that you are ready for his coming.

It is within his church that you “eat, sleep, and breathe” Christ Jesus, learning from him—from his cross and resurrection—how to live and how to die as a Christian by faith in his Word.

Now, following Christ Jesus and living with him in his house is not a selfish or solitary pursuit. Rather, just as Andrew first sought and found his brother, Simon (vv 41–42), so you also seek out your family and friends, urge them to “come and see,” to join you in finding and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do it by confessing the Word that you have heard and by living in harmony with that Word. As you are catechized to live your entire life by faith in Christ Jesus, show forth his Gospel in dealing with your neighbors. This most natural evangelism is not any kind of program; it’s a way of life in the way of Christ, just as he teaches you to live in him in holy faith and holy love.

III.

To be sure, in bringing his brother, Simon Peter, to Christ Jesus, Andrew also anticipated the way that both he and his brother would be called to give special service to the Lord. These two men were not only called to follow Jesus as disciples—as you and all Christians are called to follow Jesus and to learn from him—but they were also called and sent out as apostles of the same Lord Jesus Christ. And that is quite another matter altogether, for which we give thanks and celebrate on this day.

As an apostle, Andrew was sent in the name and stead of Christ, as a personal representative of the Good Shepherd. In that office and vocation, he continued the ministry of John the Baptist and of Jesus himself. He baptized others into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, he preached the Word for repentance and faith, and he fed the sheep with the very Lamb of God.

In all of these ways and means, the ministry of the Gospel is more than just a word or message *about* Jesus, mere information. It is the real presence and proclamation of Christ himself, who comes to you here and now by these very Means of Grace to prepare you for his coming in glory for the final judgment.

Our blessed Lord, in his own divine wisdom and great mercy, chose to call Andrew to that apostolic ministry of his Gospel for the benefit of his church and to the glory of his holy name. And as John, Andrew’s fellow apostle, writes in his Book of Revelation, we know that Andrew’s name, as one of “the twelve apostles of the Lamb,” adorns the foundation of the holy city, new Jerusalem, the very city of heaven itself (Rev 21:14), for which we wait and hope and daily pray, especially during Advent.

In a very real sense, that apostolic ministry began when Andrew left John the Baptist and took his brother with him to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. From that day, the very same apostolic ministry has continued by the grace of the same Lord Jesus throughout the centuries, also here and now to you in the preaching and sacraments administered by called preachers. And it is that apostolic ministry by which you are prepared for the salvation ready to be revealed on the Last Day.

IV.

By this ministry of the Gospel, by the preaching and Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of your sins, and by the body and blood of the Lamb, given and poured out for you to eat and drink, you are prepared to face your death and your own “judgment day,” whenever and however that may occur, as Andrew was prepared by the same Word and Sacraments of Christ for his own courageous death as a Christian martyr.

Having been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and having been fed by his body and his blood in the Holy Communion, Andrew knew by faith that he had been made ready by Christ Jesus himself, in body and soul, for the life everlasting. So also for you and all who are baptized into Christ. Even your death from this mortal life is not able to separate you from him, for the Lamb of God who takes away your sins and conquers death is here with you in the flesh.

So it begins, and so it goes. With Andrew and all the saints who have gone before us in the faith and confession of Jesus, you are baptized in his name as a beloved and well-pleasing child of his God and Father. You are forgiven by his Gospel. You are fed from his table and served by his love. And by this apostolic ministry of Christ Jesus, you are given his life everlasting.

In the name + of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Children's Messages

ADVENT 1, DECEMBER 3, 2023

Grace in Jesus

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Visual: paraments and banners with crosses and symbols for Jesus, crosses in the chancel

Summary: Advent is a time when we remember that God has given us the grace we need to stand before him when Jesus visibly returns.

Rev. Patrick J. Kuhlman, Pastor,
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Avilla, Indiana

Good morning! In our reading from 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul wrote to people that were troubled by many sins. They had done things that were wrong. They had fought with one another. They had been mean to one another and said nasty things about one another. They had even been selfish. They needed something called grace. Grace is God's love and mercy and forgiveness for us in Jesus. Grace is when God gives people all kinds of good things instead of the punishment they deserve for their sins.

Do you ever need grace because you fought with a brother or a sister? How about for being mean? for saying nasty things and being selfish? I see nodding heads. And if Mom or Dad or a teacher comes and sees us doing these things and we have to say, "Yes, I did that bad thing," we feel terrible, don't we! We'd rather have grace. We all need grace. We all need God's love and mercy and forgiveness in Jesus.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said that he was thankful for the grace that was given them in Jesus. We have crosses here in the front of the sanctuary. We have paraments, cloth hanging on the altar, pulpit, and lectern. We have banners too. How many crosses and symbols for Jesus can you find? *Receive responses.* That's a lot of crosses and symbols for Jesus! They're all reminders of why God gives us grace. When Jesus lived perfectly for us and the Corinthians, when he died on a cross for the Corinthians and for us, we received grace from God.

Advent is a time we remember that Jesus is coming back someday. If we had to stand before him that day and receive punishment for our sins, that would be awful! But Advent is also a time we remember that God has given us the grace we need. We were blessed with his love and mercy and forgiveness in Jesus. That means that when God looks at you, he doesn't see your sin. He sees you as without sin. He sees you as perfect and holy in his sight because you have been given God's grace. And that is the way he'll see you on the Last Day when Jesus comes back and visibly reappears.

ADVENT 2, DECEMBER 10, 2023

Jesus' Coming Is Closer!

Text: Isaiah 40:1-11

Visual: Advent wreath

Summary: The advent wreath helps us to remember that God is coming and to look forward to it.

Rev. Patrick J. Kuhlman, Pastor,
Immanuel Lutheran Church, Avilla, Indiana

Good morning! We have an Advent wreath here in church today. It was here last week too. *Point out Advent wreath.* How many candles are lit today? *Receive responses.* Last week, one candle was lit. Next Sunday, three candles will be lit. Two Sundays from now, four candles will be lit. We'll be getting closer to Christmas and our celebration of Jesus' coming to be born. When one candle is lit, we're getting close to Jesus coming at Christmas. When two candles are lit today, we're getting closer. When three are lit, we're really close to Jesus coming. And when all four candles are lit, we're really, really, really close to Jesus coming. On Christmas, all the candles will be lit, including the white candle in the middle. Jesus' coming will be here!

An Advent wreath helps us remember that Isaiah wrote about something important in our reading from the Old Testament. Isaiah said that God was coming: "Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might . . . behold, his reward is with him" (Is 40:10). Isaiah said that God would come and rescue his people from their sin. God would come and take his people home. God would come in forgiving love. He would come to forgive and make things right.

God did come. God came to us at Christmas in Jesus. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to die on a cross to rescue us from our sins and bring us back to God. One day in the future, Jesus will come again. We will all see him on the Last Day, when he visibly comes. On that day, Jesus will take us to the heavenly home he's prepared for us.

When you see the Advent wreath and its candles being lit every week, remember Isaiah. Remember how Isaiah said that God was coming. Remember how God came in Jesus at Christmas to forgive our sin. And remember that Jesus is coming again someday to take us to the heavenly home he's prepared for us. As one candle is lit, we're close to Jesus coming again. It could be any day. When two candles are lit, like today, Jesus' coming back is even closer. Next week, when three candles are lit . . . well, maybe we're so close that he'll come before next Sunday. Or maybe before the next. Or maybe years. Whenever it is, it'll be the greatest!