

One Year

What if you had one year to live? 365 days. 52 weeks. 8,760 hours. This would be your last advent. Think about that for a moment – your last advent. We never know when we will die – car accidents, illness, freak accidents happen. Your mindset changes when you think you have one year to live. I would feel pain due my loss of time with family and friends, fear of the unknown and a bit of hope. That ‘bit of hope’ tempers the pain. The ‘bit of hope’ is the comfort of knowing where I am going; that God is with me no matter what.

What would you change if you had one year to live? My guess is that you would 1) focus on who/what is important to you and 2) wrap up the loose ends of your life. One of those loose ends in your life might just be your relationship with Christ. Are you ready to meet the Lord?

Even though we are *incredibly blessed* to have our ‘wages of sin’ paid for us, we still have an accounting before God. In the Apostles Creed we will say in a few minutes, we state that Jesus will “Come again to judge the living and the dead”. How do you feel about that? Are you prepared? How are you using advent to prepare for Jesus?

Advent is a time of preparation. Have you noticed that God is a good at preparing us? The Bible is full of foreshadowing; of preparations. How much? Well I ran across a book titled 400 Prophecies, Appearances, or Foreshadowings of Christ in the Old Testament written by Paul Humber. With 39 books in the Old Testament, that is over 10 foreshadowing’s of Jesus per book. Jesus himself quotes the Old Testament in John 5:39 in speaking to the Pharisees: *"You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they {scriptures} that testify on my behalf."*

Our first lesson in Malachi prepares us for the coming of John the Baptist who is the link between the Old and New Testaments. The Gospel today points to Isaiah regarding the coming of Jesus and the need to prepare. Yep God is good at this preparation stuff. Are we?

Preparing is a good and worthy exercise. We all do it. It is part of our culture. The Boy Scout Motto is “BE PREPARED” which means you are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty.... so that you know the right thing to do at the right moment, and are willing to do it.” (Wikipedia) Let me repeat that: So that you know the right thing to do at the right moment and are willing to do it.

Preparing is a verb. It involves change. It is not location, political or economic specific – it is YOU specific. Note Luke points out the political and religious environment of his day. He lists powerful people. John the Baptist’s message – given in the wilderness – is for the ordinary and the powerful people. John is not satisfied with the way things are – the way people act. He encourages people to acknowledge and repent of their sins, be baptized and “bear good fruits”. **This is a challenge to change.** And not an easy one either.

Change, lasting change, can be hard. Just ask someone who wants to learn a new language, lose weight or be more connected with God. John the Baptist asks us to change, to prepare. He cries out “**Prepare the way of the Lord**”. The Gospel speaks of major roadworks:

“Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;”

Now when I read about knocking down mountains and hills, about filling valleys I don’t think about one person with a shovel. Nope – I think of giant bulldozers, front end loaders and lots of people wearing orange and hard hats. **It is about going to great lengths to prepare. That the one who is coming is worth major effort.** And one person does not do it all. Oh – each person has a part – but we work together to make it happen. We are part of the giant earthworks project that welcomes the baby Jesus.

Now if GOD, the wise, eternal and faithful One determines preparing is an important task, shouldn't we prepare? If God does it, maybe we should too? Luckily, we get the reminder to prepare for Jesus every year in advent. Let's take advantage of this yearly reminder.

I know, I know you are thinking how am I going to find time during the busy Christmas season to do major earthworks in a community of people? If someone told me to make major changes during Christmas, I'd be "Whoa Nelly – have you seen my calendar? Looked at my gift list? Do you know how many cookies I have to bake?" How am I going to prepare for Christ at the same time as preparing for the *social and economic realities of today's Christmas??* I accepted John the Baptists challenge to change. I spend more time with Jesus. Last year I prayed more and read the scriptures more. Just more. Not tons more but more. I had little reminders at home and at work that Jesus is the reason for the season.

The problem I had was life in advent is like a fast moving river with rapids. It is easy to get sucked into the wild current and forget to anchor yourself on the shore of God. I've began making an effort to make a lasting, major earthworks kind of change. I will continue that effort this year to personally connect and grow my relationship with Jesus. **After all, Jesus is worth the effort.**

Our small changes can be a major effort and have major results. While your busy shopping, notice the people around you. When someone catches your eye, say a quick prayer for them. Now I don't mean stopping in your tracks, bowing your head, folding your hands and praying out loud. You can do that if you want.... But God can hear prayers said in our hearts and minds. God hears it all. He understands our challenges and our efforts.

Make an effort to clean out your heart and mind as well this advent. When the stress of life gets to you; stop and think - is this what I want Jesus to see when he arrives? Anger that someone took the parking space I waited so long for? Maybe it's time to work at forgiveness. While you're doing a mundane task, acknowledge what is bothering you, honor it and let it go. Entrust it and the person you are working to forgive to God. God can handle it. When Jesus does arrive at Christmas, what do you want him to see in your heart and mind? We might need to do a little house cleaning.

But what about that community part? The fact that major earthworks takes a community of people to accomplish. Take a page from Lucia. Today we celebrate someone who brought food and drink to the hungry. Lucia went against her local culture to care for others and acknowledge her faith in Christ. Food and drink is an ordinary thing, needed in advent as well as year around. Lucia embodies the spirit of friendliness and goodwill. Our Warming Hearts with Warm Soup ministry does just that – it provides nourishment to those who need a little light and hope in this busy season. Our Giving Tree provides light and hope to the children in need in our community.

Our Angle Tree in the lobby helps fund hospice bringing hope and light to those who face death. The Make a Wish/Dreams for Kids silent auction here at Zion raises money for wishes of critically ill children. The Longest Night Service is a way to experience God's compassionate love for those who find Christmas difficult – whether it is thru loss of a loved one, broken families, illness or any of the other difficult things life brings. It takes a community of people doing their part to provide light and hope. Be part of something that brings light and hope to others this advent.

To make lasting changes, we need to prepare our hearts and minds often –lest we get caught up in the wild current of life and forget to anchor with God. **The Bible calls us to go to great lengths in**

preparing for Christ - because the one who is coming is worth major effort. It comes down to this: Are you ready should this to be your last advent? Go out and live this advent as if it is your last advent. Amen.