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Get Ready
Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 24:36-44

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² *In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains*

and shall be raised above the hills;

*all the **nations shall stream** to it.*

³ *Many peoples shall come and say,*

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the house of the God of Jacob,

that he may teach us his ways

*and that **we may walk in his paths.**"*

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction

and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

⁴ *He shall judge between the nations*

and shall arbitrate for many peoples;

*they shall beat their **swords into plowshares***

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation;

neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵ *O house of Jacob,*

*come, let us **walk***

in the light of the Lord!

³⁶ *"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son,^[h] but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day^[i] your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

We are surrounded by *so much bad news, so much darkness.*

I can't even tell you how sad I was this week about the Club Q shooting and that hatred, and the fact that just as the news was talking about THAT shooting a few more occurred elsewhere in our country!

We've had 607 mass shootings this year alone, it's on track to be the second highest toll ever.

That, combined with the constant news of war, suffering, hunger, and all kinds of natural disasters....it can make you *pretty depressed.*

And now that it's after Thanksgiving,
all of that *bad news is mixed in with Christmas* music everywhere,
Christmas decorations, and lots of Hallmark Christmas movies!
That combination is enough to make a sane person feel a little *crazy*, isn't it?

So, how can we *make sense of this weird time* that we live in?
The darkness we find, amidst all the holiday lights and festivities?
The hard times, right in the middle of celebrating the birth of Christ?

Well, as people of faith, we live in an *already, not-yet* time with God.
We live in between the times.
Jesus has already come, lived, died, and was resurrected,
but he has not yet come again to make all things right in the world.

So *Advent*—the four weeks leading up to Christmas—
is not just a time of waiting for December 25th,
it is also waiting for *Jesus to come again.*

Advent is a reminder that we are *ALWAYS in Advent*—
we are always waiting for that day when Jesus brings suffering to an end,
when all creation and humanity are redeemed, and all is right with the world.
A day with no more bad news. No more darkness.

Advent is also a *call to action—to wait, and to be prepared.*
To *get ready.*

Matthew's original audience was likely a group of believers
who had grown weary of waiting.

They were wondering why it was taking Jesus so long.

Some days I wonder the very same thing!

I've frequently prayed that any day now would be fine with me!

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 24 that the Son of Man (he himself) will come again—***but no one knows when, only God the Father.***

This is a very important point,
as some Christians are literally in the business of predicting the end times.
God says give that up.
It's not ours to know.
No one knows the time, except God.

Then Jesus tells some ***parables about getting ready.***
He talks about the people in Noah's day who were going about their business of life until some of them were swept away in the flood.
He talks about two people in the field—one left, one swept away.
Two grinding meal—one taken, one left behind.

There's a whole ***theology built on that second parable--the Rapture.***
It's the idea that at the end of time Jesus will snatch up the chosen believers,
and the rest will be left behind to deal with the suffering of the end of the age.
In other words—you want to be the one taken away from the field, not left behind.
So live the right way, ***or you'll be left behind!***

In the 1990's Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins sold 65 million copies of a Christian fiction series of 16 **books called "*Left Behind*".**
It was a big phenomenon in Oklahoma, and it scared people to death!
There was so much speculation about whether it was the end times,
And lots of angst in people's hearts—wondering, am I living the right way?
Or will I be "left behind?"

It was a movement, largely based on ***getting right behavior through FEAR.***
Kind of like hellfire and brimstone preaching
(which you might have noticed is not exactly my style!)
It's also a movement about individual salvation and eternal life.
It is focused on the self.

Well, what if there's ***a better way to wait for Jesus?***
A better way to live in Advent?
If worrying about being left behind is not the way to live,
how are we to live right now?

What if Jesus' parables are simple reminders
to ***be ready and live well,*** today?

And what if being *left behind is actually the preferred scenario* with the two workers in these parables?

After all, those who were swept away in the flood would have preferred to have been left behind, and spared, safe in Noah's ark!

So maybe you don't want to be taken away from the field!

What if Jesus' point is to *live life now*—in every ordinary way—
but keep an eye on the future.

We don't want to be like those who weren't paying attention to God in Noah's day, or those who allowed the house to be broken into!

And *what kind of FUTURE* are we looking for?

This is where Isaiah's beautiful vision comes into play.

Isaiah 2 imagines a day when

all the nations shall stream to the Lord's house....and seek the ways of the Lord.

A day when

"they shall beat their swords into plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks;

nation shall not lift up sword against nation;

neither shall they learn war any more "

Sounds a little *pie in the sky if Isaiah were to watch any of our local news,*

But doesn't it also sound **WONDERFUL**?

Don't we **LONG** for a day like that?

I know I do--

When all weapons are transformed into instruments of life,

When people can live together in harmony, not war and pain.

I sure long for that, don't you?

These verses have inspired several national programs that literally turn guns into garden tools.

It's all based on the idea that we can *do something better than hurt one another.*

And the *future can be more hopeful.*

What we see on a daily basis,

The news we hear and watch,

It is not our ultimate reality.

The ultimate reality is the *kingdom of God.*

And that kingdom comes when all creation is made new,

and all people enjoy eternal life together.

It is the day of *complete justice and peace* on earth.

But meanwhile, we *have to live in this ‘in-between’ time*—
how do we do it?

Isaiah says it clearly:

⁵ *O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

That’s the key---We find the light of Christ around us, and we live in that.

We shine the light of Christ in our own words and deeds.

We turn to the *ways of Jesus, and live THAT way.*

Paul says in **Romans 13:11-14**:

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is already the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹² the night is far gone; the day is near.

Let us then throw off^b the works of darkness and put on the armor of light¹⁴, put on the Lord Jesus Christ....

Let us throw off the works of darkness, and put on light.

Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the word ‘**US**’.

Living in Advent is not just about me, myself, and I.

It is not a call for the individual alone.

It is a call to *live well in together, in community.*

It’s about US—all of us putting on Christ, shining his light.

Christian life IS communal life.

It’s kind of like basketball.

You can practice for countless hours alone in your driveway, but that doesn’t make you a basketball player.

For that, you have to join the team!

You work together on the court, and together you make it through the game.

Then makes you a basketball player!

We as Christians, are in this in-between Advent season—together.

We are *not alone.*

We are part of a community, the body of Christ, the church.

Jesus is not just our personal Lord and Savior.

Jesus is the ***THE Lord and Savior of us all.***

I heard about an interview this week with Bono, the lead singer of U2. Years ago he was invited to meet with Billy Graham, and he was picked up from the airport by Billy's son Franklin Graham. On the ride, Franklin asked the questions that so many Christians ask, sometimes of complete strangers:

Are you saved?

Yes, Bono replied.

Do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?

To which Bono replied, "*I know Jesus, and I try **not to use him** as my personal savior.*"

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/december/bono-book-interview-cover-story-u2-hope-punk>

Our life with God is not just about us.

Thank goodness!

It's about ***ALL of us, living in this Advent season, together.***

We need one another.

We need to ***help one another stay awake*** and ready to meet Jesus, whenever that happens.

It's kind of like being a ***chaperone at a Youth Lock-In***, helping each other keep an eye on the Youth.

Or a group helping each other to make it through a special 24-hour event.

We watch with each other, we ***take turns*** watching.

That's Advent.

Advent is about ***watching and waiting—and walking in the footsteps of Jesus.***

It's about ***living well, today.***

Not getting overwhelmed by all the bad news,

And living with the reality that Jesus will come again.

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul puts it this way: *I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling** to which you have been called,*

And in Philippians 1:27 he says it like this:

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ

That's our purpose!

What does that mean to YOU?

How can you live worthy of the gospel?

What do you need to let go? What do you need to start doing?

Do you feel like you know the ways of Jesus?
 We know we learn them so deeply through the Word, worship, and fellowship.

We are called to live in a way that is *worthy of being Christian*.
 We are NOT called to live in *fear, but in faith*.
 We are not called to live in *darkness, but in light*.
 We are not called to live in *worry and anxiety, but expectation and hope*.

Which is not easy because the world our kids have inherited
 is *scary, and dangerous*.

It's not easy, because *all of our families are broken, our holidays are imperfect, and none of us look like the Christmas cards we send*.
 Worry and anxiety come naturally this time of year.
 We watch Christmas movies with longing, because our lives do not resemble them!

Living in expectation and hope is not easy,
 because the world wants us to *focus on the bad* news and darkness.
 The *world resists talk of justice, goodness, and peace*—because according to the world, those things are beyond our reach, and useless to expect.

We live in *a different reality*.
A reality that can help us make it through Advent.
 We are called to live in *faith, light and hope*.
 In fact, this week our Advent candle is the *candle of HOPE*.
 That candle is literally the sign that Jesus is right here with us,
 as we wait on his return.
 He is the *light of hope*, in the darkness of this world.

And hope is what helps us keep going and expecting a better future.
 Viktor Frankl, the German psychiatrist who survived the concentration camps, said
 that the one thing that helped people survive those camps was-- **HOPE**.
 Hope in the future, not dwelling in the past.

Our Christian faith is always *forward looking, forward moving*.
 Advent is about moving toward His second coming, and a new future.
How will YOU look to the future this Advent?

For me, it means *letting go* of some of the *pain* of the past.
 Letting go of some *hurts* of Christmases past.

So that I can *truly enjoy Christmas present, and have hope for the future.*

It also means *letting go of unrealistic expectations.*

As much as I love the movie *White Christmas*, my life is not that.

As much as I enjoy sending beautiful Christmas cards, and pictures of family,
My life is also not that.

And that is ok.

If *my life were perfect, why would I need a Savior?*

If my life today was *just fine, why would I wait* for something better?

Living in Advent also means *letting go of old ways,*
and making room for *new habits—*

so that we will be ready and prepared, whenever He comes again.

I hope it's soon, but in the meantime,

We wait-- in faith, light, and hope.

That is the *Good News of the Gospel.*

And for that Good News, all God's people can say together, Amen.