

December 2nd
Fr. Jack Estes

Read Isaiah 45

Advent is a season of expectation and hope, a time of anticipation and watching for the fulfillment of God's promise in the coming of the messiah. Advent literally means arrival, and this season calls us to prepare our hearts for the arrival of the King. The liturgical colors and symbols of this season heighten our awareness of these themes, providing a visual invitation to make ready because the Lord is drawing near. The original color for Advent is blue, symbolizing the royalty of the king and the color of the sky where we look for his appearing. Often today purple is used instead because Advent, like Lent, is considered a penitential season. It is a time for inward reflection, responding to the cry of John the Baptist "Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

The circular advent wreath symbolizes the eternal nature of God, with the four outer candles representing the four weeks of the season and the four centuries of waiting from the last word of the Old Testament until the birth of Jesus, the Christ: The candle of expectation and hope; The candle of peace; The candle of joy; and the candle of love. These are attributes fulfilled in the presence of the messiah when he comes, and we light the candle in the center on Christmas showing that the Light of God has arrived in the world.

The prophet Isaiah artfully expresses the themes and expectations of the Advent season, writing some seven hundred years before Jesus is born. Indeed, he lays out a prophetic sequence and promise of the coming of the messiah throughout his writings, and the judgement and mercy that will come with him. We pick up this prophesy in our lectionary reading for evening prayer, dropping into the middle of the book in chapter forty-five. Here God himself is speaking in the first person, using the prophet as his microphone to the people. "Thus says the Lord, I will go before you... I am the Lord there is no other...I made the heaven and the earth...turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other." It is a promise of deliverance and blessing, salvation and righteousness. The season of expectation has begun.

The Holy One of Israel holds all things in his hands. All creation bows before him, and all history unfolds according to his design. How then shall we prepare to stand in the presence of such a glorious and holy God? Only by acknowledging him as the only Lord and turning from the idols we have embraced which are ultimately worthless. "The makers of idols go in to confusion together... they have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols and keep praying to gods that cannot save."

What idols? In our day we do not have little statues of wood or gold that we bow and worship like the ancient pagans, or do we? Perhaps ours just have a different shape or more subtle appearance. Our society is rife with idolatry: Idols of wealth and materialism; sports teams; political leaders and celebrities; and the pervasive worship of bodies and sensuality. Together they conspire to steal our hearts away from our true identity as sons and daughters of the Holy One.

Advent calls us to prepare with intentional expectation, so that we may be ready when the messiah arrives. The prophet Isaiah declares this season as he calls us back to worship the one, only, true and holy God. How then shall we respond, and purge ourselves from the idols that surround us? There is no better place to begin than with a meditation on the word of God. On this first day of Advent, I invite you to make a new beginning with a meditation on the reading by the prophet Isaiah. Take a few moments and read fresh Isaiah chapter 45. Read it once and reflect; read it twice – slowly; read it a third time and listen for God speaking directly to you. Expect his presence and prepare your heart for the season of Advent has begun.

Fr. Jack ministers at St. Luke's

December 3rd
Dcn. Ron Christolear

Read Isaiah 46

In this chapter, Isaiah is aiming straight at the heart of the matter, the false gods of the people. In this chapter God points us to the differences between false gods and Himself. God calls their idols, “these things you carry.” He not only says they cannot save the burden,” but they themselves are the cause of the people’s burdens. In other words, when the people who serve them go into captivity, their false gods are useless. Not only are they useless, it is they who must be borne by the worshiper. They bear no burden, it is the worshiper who must bear the entire burden.

God, on the other hand, declares in verses 3-5, that because He has borne Israel “before their birth,” it is He who will carry their burden as He has done from the beginning. What is it that makes this distinction? It is YHWH (Yahweh), the living God, the creator of all things. He is not a god made by human hands who must be carried-about, but instead is the God who has created all things by His mighty hand, who carries our burdens. In verse 5, we read, “To whom will you liken me and make me equal?” We often hear people attempt to explain God through human analogies, especially using things in creation, but nothing in creation can adequately describe God’s true nature and character.

In verses 8-11, God calls the transgressor to stand firm and to remember. On what basis are they commanded to stand firm? On what grounds are they commanded to remember? God Himself gives the answer. “I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.” The remaining question is, “Do what?” God continues, “I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”

God promised Israel that He would bring forth salvation, and those who call on the name of Jesus Christ know this promise to be true. For it is in Jesus that God has and will fulfill this promise. We look back in great thanksgiving at the salvation God has provided through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross two-thousand years ago, and the new life he gives through His resurrection. We now await the promise of His second coming.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity

December 4th
Fr. Mark Hall

Read Psalm 88

“LORD, why have you rejected me? Why have you hidden your face from me?” v15

The season of Advent reminds us that we live our lives as Christians in tension. As we prepare to celebrate Christ coming into the world as a helpless babe, we also prepare for his return in great power and glory. We live between the already of the cross of Christ and the not yet of the restoration of all things. In the midst of great rejoicing, we also experience profound suffering and adversity. Perhaps the least healthy way to deal with this tension is to run from, or deny the suffering that frames our humanity. One of the easiest ways to do this is to deny our emotions a healthy outlet for expression.

The Psalms provide us a great means for profound expression, as they display the full range of human emotions. The psalms of lament, like Psalm 88, are especially helpful in venting our more challenging feelings like anguish, depression, and despair. The psalmist begins with crying out “my God, my Savior” and ends with the haunting words that this same Lord has made “darkness his only companion.” He gives expression to his feelings as he describes great waves crashing down, sweeping him away, and floodwaters engulfing him (8:17-18). Lament feels overwhelming with grief and mourning, moving us into a landscape that appears dark and devoid of life.

Yet the psalmist declares that his God of loving-kindness, who is faithful, righteous, and performs wonders, is responsible for his anguish (12-13). What are we to make of this? First, we learn that part of the tension we live in means we will have both experiences of God’s nearness, as well as of his absence. The psalmist’s anguish, depression, and despair are intensified because he no longer feels God’s presence like he once did. This is indeed a common reality amongst Christians; what St. John of the Cross referred to as the dark night of the soul.

How do you respond when you no longer feel God’s nearness... when he feels distant and far off? Growing up in Bakersfield I have memories of fog so thick you couldn’t see the houses across the street. When the fog of our circumstances and uncomfortable feelings cloud our view, we remember that God is indeed present, just as my neighbors’ homes were in the fog. We remember too that Jesus entered into this fog himself and did not run from it. We need not run either, and like the psalmist, we can cry out to God and share our feelings, including our anger and disappointment with him.

Today, let us express the full range of our feelings to God, the comfortable and uncomfortable ones. Remembering that when Christ returns, the fog of pain and adversity will be swept away and only the brightness of peace, joy, and love will remain.

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints’

December 5th
Fr. Randy Messick

Read Luke 11-1:28

More than the other gospels Luke makes note of the frequency with which our Lord prayed. Jesus prayed often, and in this reading from Luke, we read that Jesus was praying in a certain place. This special place that Jesus had set aside for prayer teaches us the importance of setting aside a special place for ourselves to spend time with the Father. While prayer is certainly to be done in any and all places, it is not a bad idea to have a place set aside for our regular daily prayer- a place where we can not only speak without interruption to God, but also where we can easily listen to him speak to us.

Frequent daily prayer is an essential discipline if we are to remain in a right relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The apostles obviously took note of how often Jesus prayed, and they also must have taken note of the uniqueness of his prayers, and so asked him to teach them how to pray, thus we come to the giving of the Lord's Prayer.

In Matthew's version, Jesus tells them to "pray in this way" and, in Luke's, we have, "when you pray say..." This prayer then is to be used both as a guide for our personal prayers, and as a set prayer that expresses for us that which we need to say to the Father.

"Teach us to pray", is a very good prayer in itself. In our fallen state we humans don't even know how to begin a conscious relationship with God without His help. Therefore let us use the Lord's Prayer as both a guide for how to pray, and as the words given us to speak.

We acknowledge God as our Father who is hallowed and above all things. We desire above all else the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth and in our own hearts, that we would always seek to do His will and not our own. We acknowledge our continuing and daily dependence on Him, and we ask Him for our daily needs. We ask forgiveness daily for the sins we continue to commit and we acknowledge the need for our own forgiveness, and therefore the rightness that we forgive all those who sin against us. Not just some, but all. We acknowledge the danger of temptation. That it is as dangerous as sin itself, and we ask that God would shield us from that, so that we would not sin. Finally, we ask God to free us from evil and from the wiles of the evil one.

Our needs are great! Jesus tells us the Father will meet our needs if we sincerely go to Him in prayer, and admit our need and ask for His grace to do for us all that we cannot do for ourselves.

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican

December 6th
Fr. Karl Dietze

Read Isaiah 49

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." Isaiah 49: 14-16

Have you ever felt like God has forgotten about you? That He doesn't seem to be aware of you, of what's going on in your life?

The Israelites felt that way. They felt abandoned. They were in exile, cast out of their homeland, foreigners in a foreign land. As they looked around, they found evidence that God had forgotten them. Despite all God's promises, they were depressed and hopeless. "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me."

There are times when our circumstances are bad or not what we would have them be. We look at our lives and come to the conclusion that God is either silent or has taken no notice of our situation. It is into that loneliness, pain, fear, and even desperation that our God speaks. "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you."

What an incredibly tender image! "Can a woman forget her nursing child?" How many mothers speak of the incredible bond and preciousness of nursing their child? It is more than an act of provision, it is tender love and protection in the safety of a mother's arms. That most tender of earthly loves points us to the unstoppable love God has for His people. "I will not forget you." Sometimes it is hard to believe we are loved like that!

But then, in a phrase that Isaiah could hardly have known would unfold as it did, he spoke the Lord's word, "Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands..." The Lord has written our names in His flesh so as never to forget our names. It is a profound image of God's covenant love and dedication to us. But it is also an image that came to pass literally, for as the nails were driven into Jesus' hands, so God's love for His people was forever engraved in His hands. Sometimes it is hard to believe we are loved like that!

You are engraved on the palms of Jesus' hands. You are known, loved, and never forgotten. Even when you cannot see Him, even when your life seems to be forsaken, you can know in the depths of your being that God loves you with perfect love.

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity

December 7th
Dcn. Skip Hill

Read Isaiah 50

“The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me?” Isaiah 50:7-8

December 7, 1941 has been characterized as “A Day to Live in Infamy” in speech delivered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Why? It is because it was the day on which the Japanese navy launched a surprise military attack against the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor located on the island of O’ahu. The Japanese attack stunned virtually everyone in the United States military, let alone on the Island of O’ahu. Historians have looked back on the events of that period of history, and many have pointed out that there were many signs of the times that pointed to the potential for such an attack, but these warnings were not heeded. Our Nation was caught of guard; it was not just disgraced, but, we found that our naval forces were severely decimated.

On this 7th day of December, many people continue to ignore the signs of the times. But, as we look forward to the fulfillment of the signs and prophecies of the Bible, we do not need to be caught unaware. Throughout history God had provided more than enough information for His chosen People, the Hebrews, that, though His promises are delayed, yet they will certainly be fulfilled. Those that paid attention to the prophecies recognized that the time of fulfillment was near. It did not matter that the fulfillment came in ways that were not expected; the importance that God promised to send His son to bring salvation to His people, and the job of His followers was to watch for the signs and believe that God’s promises would come true. With belief in the prophecies of the Old Testament, those who had studied the Word of God recognized the fulfillment of them.

However, like “Pearl Harbor Day”, in spite of God’s efforts to prepare His people, the majority did not recognize the event when it came. By taking God at His word, we can proclaim, with Isaiah.

As we look forward to the celebration of the birth of our Savior this Advent Season, let us not just enjoy the festivities of the season; let us take to heart, that what God promised, He will fulfill. Praise God for His immeasurable gift.

Dcn. Skip ministers at St. Luke’s

December 8th
Dcn. John LaMar

Read Luke 12:35-53

“Do you think that I come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.” (Luke 12:51)

Just as many of Jesus’ disciples found his teaching identifying himself as “the bread of life” (John 6:35a) to be difficult to accept, so too many of us contemporary disciples may find his declaration of bringing division rather than peace to the earth equally troublesome. “On hearing it, many of his disciples said ‘This is a hard saying. Who can accept it?’” (John 6:60). But why division and not peace many may well ask. For did not the multitude of heavenly host proclaim, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”? (Luke 2:14) And does not the great prophet Isaiah proclaim him to be the “Prince of Peace” (Ref. Isaiah 9:6)? So why this saying from prophecy? Is not the Church going to win the world to Christ? And are not we all God’s children? The answer is “no” and “no”.

God the Father extended the olive branch of peace to a world in absolute and total rebellion saying, “Come now, let us reason together” (Ref. Isaiah 1:18-20). But the world, by and large, rejected his gracious offering of peace but to those who accepted His Son’s reconciling work on the Cross, they have become “children of light” and now stand in stark contrast to the “children of darkness” who remain in rebellion. It is Christ Jesus himself who is the cause of this “division” among the people for he is the “sword” that set the one against the other and it is he, the “Shepherd”, who will separate, once and for all, the “sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:32) at the final judgement.

James, writing to Jewish believers said it very clearly, warning them, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” (James 4:4) Speaking to the Serpent in the Garden of Eden God said, “And I will put enmity (hatred) between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:15) The “siren song” of brotherhood, friendship and communion with an unbelieving and lost world can only lead to compromise and eventually apostasy in the Church. Let us never forget that we have been “called out of the world” and redeemed to be a particular people unto God.

This Advent season let us humbly thank God, through Christ Jesus, that He has so deliberately and forcefully divided and separated his people, the Church, from the world that we may forever be known as children of the Kingdom. Amen.

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity

December 9, 2018
Dcn. Gregory Statezni

Read Luke 12:54 thru 13:1-9

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none." ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, "Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" Luke 13:6-7

Suppose God comes to you now and he looks at your life. What if He were to put you on his balance then weighs your life and finds you wanting. He then sizes you up and examines you. What is he looking for? He is looking for fruit. Love, joy, peace . . . poverty of spirit, mourning for your guilt and shame, hunger for righteousness . . . love that is patient and kind, that does not envy, that does not boast, that is not proud, that is not rude, that is not self-seeking, that is not easily angered, that keeps no record of wrongs. He is looking for such fruit in your life. Are these not good and great things? He is not asking you to run a four minute mile. He is not asking you for perfection as a qualification for grace. He is asking whether you are adding fruitfulness to your lives week by week and year by year. Is it there? You say you are a Christian, that Jesus Christ lives in your life, so where are the marks of that?

Sometimes we see the marks of an outward cancerous growth in a person's life in a visible illness, weakness or loss of weight. Those are the negative marks of a destructive alien life within us, but here is the infinite opposite, the presence of that life Jesus spoke of as being in you when our Lord said, "I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly," Abundant life that is all divine, all loving, and all holy, and all saving. Where is the fruit of the living spirit of Jesus evident in your life?

That is what God is looking for? What does Jesus say in this parable? "He went to look for fruit on it" (v.6). God says he will cut down every tree that does not bear fruit. What does your relationship between you and God look like? If He were to come today what would it be like when you faced the Lord? Will he be pleased with the marks of grace in your life - is there complete trust in Him, a poverty of spirit about your own achievements, and is your hope in Him alone. I am speaking to you today on the authority of the Bible, on these words of Jesus within the whole framework of what we find in Scriptures and how the Word tells us how we should live. They tell us on that Day the Lord might say you about your life. Hopefully not "Cut it down!"

Dcn. Greg ministers at Trinity

December 10th
Fr. Jack Estes

Read Isaiah 53

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ According to Isaiah.

As we approach the middle of the Advent season, we feel a growing anticipation that Christmas will soon be here. We expect Christmas to arrive on the appointed day of December 25th in all its glory. We look forward to the celebrations planned with family and friends, and the joy of being with the ones we love. We make our preparations with certainty that, yes, Christmas will soon be here.

In preparing for this arrival, Advent calls us to delve deeper and prepare our hearts for the mystery and the meaning of the arrival of the one whom Christmas represents – the Messiah, Jesus Christ. For when Jesus is present, Christmas has come. In him God’s plan of salvation is fulfilled. It is as we say, “the reason for the season.”

This promise of the arrival of Christ and the salvation he brings is found written throughout the book of the prophet Isaiah. In particular, he describes the character and actions of the coming messiah, in a series of four poems known as The Servant Songs. * These songs describe someone who is clearly human and yet directly associated with God himself. He comes with the heart of a servant to effect God’s will. He comes in perfect obedience. He comes in mercy, as an extension of the Holy One of Israel. The task set before him is to take on the suffering of the whole world. The suffering caused by sin and the consequences thereof – your suffering and mine - so that he may redeem and restore humanity back to right relationship with God.

Today in the lectionary for evening prayer we read the fourth of the Servant Songs found in Is. 53, known as the Song of the Suffering Servant. This passage is often quoted in the New Testament in description of Jesus himself and his atoning sacrifice for our sins. Indeed, it is hard to read this poem from our perspective in history and not think of Jesus. It so accurately depicts his passion, suffering and death that one would think Isaiah stood at the foot of the cross when he wrote it. “He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, by his scourging we are healed.... All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.” This is the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Isaiah.

The song of the suffering servant is a song of good news for all mankind. The servant literally absorbs our sin, affliction and anguish, standing in our place as the perfect intercessor. We are guilty. He is innocent. When the time of judgment comes, he chains himself to the whipping post and we are set free. In this servant song Isaiah anticipates the arrival of the messiah in his first advent when he comes to suffer on our behalf. Later in the book he also anticipates the second advent of the messiah, when he comes as the anointed conqueror to rule over all the earth. Today we are living at a time between the two advents of Christ. A time of the already, but not yet. It is a time given to us to prepare for his arrival.

As we prepare for the celebration of Christmas this year, we do so with expectation and certainty of its arrival on Dec. 25th. Do we have the same level of expectation and certainty of the imminent arrival Jesus? Now is the time to take the opportunity afforded us in this season of Advent, to prepare our hearts for his arrival. Listen again to the song of the suffering servant. Hear the words and let the melody settled down into your soul. Know that the servant is singing this song for you. Let the deeper truth and meaning of Christmas pierce through the clutter of the world around us into your own heart, and we too will be prepared to live as Jesus lived – as servants of the most-high God.

*The Servant songs (also called the Servant poems or the Songs of the Suffering Servant) are four songs in the Book of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible, which include Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 49:1-6; Isaiah 50:4-7; and Isaiah 52:13-53:12. They were first identified by Bernhard Duhm in his 1892 commentary on Isaiah. (Wikipedia)

Fr. Jack ministers at St. Luke's

December 11th
Dcn. Ron Christolear

Read Luke 14:1-24

Every Friday I have a class of “mobility-impaired” students who visit my music room for a half hour of music fun. We dance, and I help them play various instruments, but mostly we dance. This consists of pushing them around in their wheelchairs as we listen to a variety of musical styles. The thing is, those of us who dance them around the room, we get paid to do it. There are, however, a group of 5th grade girls at our school, who give up their recess time each Friday to come in and dance with these students. They don’t have to, and no one even suggested it to them, they simply showed up one Friday and the rest, as they say, is history.

The parables in today’s reading all have one thing in common, putting others first. From Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath, sitting in places of honor, or doing things in order to receive an earthly reward, it’s all about putting others first. In other words, “humility.” In the story of Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath, Jesus didn’t care what the Pharisees would think of him. He knew what the right thing was to do, and he did it.

Jesus asks them a question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” Jesus asks the same question in Luke 6:9, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” And again, Jesus confronts this same issue when healing the woman with the disabling Spirit in Luke 13:10 – 17. Each time Jesus is confronted with healing on the Sabbath, he gives no concern for what others’ think of him. He does it because it is the right thing to do.

My challenge for us, this Advent Season, is to look beyond ourselves, and beyond what others’ think, and look for ways we can serve others, even if that means impeding our progress toward Sunday morning Worship. Is it really that important to get that same seat each week, or to be the first at the Altar Rail each Sunday? Have you, or I, stopped on a Sunday morning and taken the time to help someone in need, knowing it would interfere with our schedule, or that it would probably be an act no one would see or recognize?

During this Advent Season, I want to challenge us to step outside ourselves and follow the example that Jesus sets in being a servant, no matter what others may think of us.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity

December 12th
Fr. Mark Hall

Read Isaiah 55

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.”v8

Try for a moment to mentally step out of your roles with their many responsibilities, your support for various causes, and take an impartial look at the world around you. Does what you see make sense, or is it confusing and depressing? Is the way we treat others who believe, vote, or live differently from us pleasing to you? How about to God? Advent reminds us of the tension that though God became one of us, his ways and thoughts are categorically different from ours and infinitely mysterious.

As I began my journey of faith I was told a bit of information that is still helpful for me to remember. If I can know and understand everything about God then he is not big enough to save me. Such knowing and understanding would confine my view of God as capable of acting only in ways I can accept and approve. Like Thomas Jefferson, I would quickly have to do away with all of Jesus’ miracles. Before you know it, I’d get rid of anything I find difficult or offensive to my cultural tastes. Theologian H. Reinhold Niebuhr spoke of what it looks like when culture hijacks the Christian message: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

As we survey the landscape of our world, it may be depressing and confusing as we struggle to find God’s activity. Another loved one is diagnosed with terminal cancer, eleven are slaughtered in the midst of worship, a child dies in a car accident. Why, Lord? Where are you, Lord? This makes no sense Lord! These are the same questions, the same heart cries of the Israelites as they were in exile. God, through the prophet Isaiah declares, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” The good news is that God hears, he responds, and though we cannot know everything about him, he does share enough of his thoughts and ways to help us understand more of him.

In Isaiah 55 we are repeatedly invited to come and listen to God, to taste and know that he graciously desires us to live in relationship with him. He longs for us to seek, call out to, and return to him in child-like trust; with hearts that are open to receive his word, so that our lives may be rooted in his compassionate, steadfast love. And he promises that part of his salvation work will include the restoration of all things. Perhaps part of the promised joy we will experience then will be the peace of knowing God face to face, and having answers to the present questions and cries of our hearts.

May we find ourselves filled with that which truly satisfies, but cannot be labored for or purchased: the grace and love of God in Jesus Christ. May it so stir a fire within us by the Holy Spirit, that we will share Jesus’ love with all, especially those who live differently than us.

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints’

December 13th
Fr. Randy Messick

Read Luke 15:11 to the end.

The story of the prodigal son is one of the most well-known parables in the bible, and for good reason. It describes the plight of all fallen humanity. When Adam and Eve made the decision that they would be their own gods and would seek their happiness and satisfaction apart from God's will for them, they condemned themselves to be sent off into a far country.

In the parable, the father knows that the son will not only be lost, but will in fact die in this far country. This far country is one in which the son will not know what is best for him. He will believe that sin, (that which kills us and separates us from the father), is what he really truly wants. This is the insanity of the far country-that all who live in it are under a dark cloud of corrupt thinking unable to see and recognize truth. Fortunately, there was a way out for him. It was when he "came to himself". He is given a moment of clarity. This is the moment where he finally sees the truth about himself. He sees the terrible mistake he has made by trusting in himself, and believing the lie that sin is actually something good, something that is in fact necessary for our survival and our well-being. He comes to himself and knows that he has been living the great lie of sin. He comes to see that being even a lowly servant in his father's house is infinitely better than a life run on self-will. When he acts on this realization and returns to the father there is no doubt that he made the right decision. There was much rejoicing in the father's house at the return of this dead son to life as there is much rejoicing in heaven when even one sinner comes to himself and repents.

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican

December 14th
Dcn. Leslie Arbegast

Read Luke 16

As I studied the readings for today, I was taken, as I often am, by the mirror image of these ancient writings to our time. As we often say at Morning Prayer at St. Luke's when reading the Scriptures "it is just like looking at the newspaper". We would agree that our generation lives in an ungodly time just as those to whom Isaiah and, to a later age, Jesus was speaking. Even concerning this season of thanksgiving and anticipation, we find ourselves in a divisive society, those celebrating the beginning of the Redemption Story, and those rejecting Christ and replacing Him with a secular Christmas. Isaiah has strong words for his generation and ours for those who reject God's authority in the world. "But you—come here, you sons of a sorceress, you offspring of adulterers and prostitutes. Whom are you mocking? At whom do you sneer and stick out your tongue? Are you not a brood of rebels, the offspring of liars" (Isaiah 57 3:4 New International Version). The writer of Psalm 109 is facing undeserved persecution and wants God's justice for the injury done to the saints. "Help me, O Lord, my God; save me in accordance with your love. Let them know that it is your hand, that you, O Lord, have done it" (Psalm 109:26-27 NIV). In the parable of the Shrewd Manager, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees as well and shows us that those called by God cannot serve the world and God "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight" (Luke 16:14 NIV).

Christmas is coming, the Savior is to be born for us, but Christmas in the culture today rarely acknowledges this fact. Instead, it tells us that joy in this season comes from believing in the "magic" of Christmas, nonstop partying and spending money with abandon. Before becoming a Christian, I looked to this kind of Christmas for joy and fulfillment and was often let down without knowing why. Perhaps, you have had a similar experience. The season of Advent, with its call to study and contemplation of the birth of Jesus, gives us opportunity to see past the false promises of a worldly Christmas. As Anglicans, we are given the opportunity to set time aside to prepare our hearts and minds for celebrating the most glorious of births; to re-dedicate ourselves to God and to His Gospel; to share the light that we have been given with others, especially those in most need of His love and mercy.

Isaiah begins Chapter 57 with the comforting words that the righteous of God "those who walk uprightly enter into peace". In His parable, Jesus calls us to faithfulness, stewardship and heavenly treasure. As we continue in Advent, may we encourage those we meet to look to the Christmas of Bethlehem for Hope, Love, Joy and Peace.

Dcn. Leslie ministers at St. Luke's

December 15th
Fr. Karl Dietze

Read Revelation 7

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God...” Revelation 7:14-15

The scene of the seventh chapter of Revelation is really a response to the question that ends chapter six. “Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17)

Who can stand?

Sometimes I think we are so familiar with God’s grace that we forget His holiness. We need to be reminded that we cannot stand before God’s holiness on our own. The calling of Isaiah captures it well:

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple...and I said “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Isaiah 6:1, 5

Who can stand? On their own, no one.

But the scene of the seventh chapter of Revelation show us that there are those who stand and serve before the throne. Who are they? They aren’t necessarily the spiritual superstars. They are those who are coming out of the great tribulation which is this life - they have sought to be faithful followers of Jesus and have endured to the end. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb - they have come to the Cross of Christ and received the gift of eternal life from the One who died for our sins in our place.

They have washed their robes white and therefore they stand.

Our confidence is not in ourselves and our ability to be pleasing to God. If that was all we had, no one could stand. But our confidence is in Jesus and the gift of eternal life He offers us in the Cross. Because we have washed our robes and made them white in His blood, we know that He will lead us home to that place where He wipes away every tear from our eyes and restores us to everything He ever intended us to be.

Who can stand? Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord – *we* stand!

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity

December 16th
Dcn. John LaMar

Read Luke 17:20 – end

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.” (Luke 17:28-30)

You may have heard the words to the to a country song years ago saying, “Lord, I want to go to heaven but I don’t want to go right now.” Truth be told, we Christians too easily forget that we, just like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are sojourners and pilgrims in a land that is not our own and living among a people who are not our own. This is not to be mean spirited or judgmental but we have much in common with Abraham’s nephew Lot in that we often become too comfortable and too identifiable with those whom we live and work with who are not God’s people.

What is it that we pray every time we gather for worship, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Do we really mean what we are praying? Do we long and yearn for His Kingdom to come upon us and once and for all set our world aright or have we, just like Lot and his family become far too comfortable and too closely identifiable with the men and women of this world and all that opposes God and His Christ. How can we witness to a lost and dying world if there is nothing about us and within us that makes us stand out in contrast to it? Over the years I have been mindful of a provocative question from a popular Christian radio program that you may have heard of when the program host would ask his radio audience, “If you were arrested and brought into court, accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

May I ask you this, “Are you ‘salt and light’ where God has planted you?” If you were “here today and gone tomorrow” would your neighbors, your community or the world at large, for that matter, notice that a “great light for good” has been extinguished? If you are faithfully laboring for the kingdom of God, then even if the world does not take notice, heaven and all its angels will! Without a doubt the world will keep on “eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building” for such is the way of the world that we live in but rather than being like Lot let us strive to be more like noble Abraham and Sarah, living in the world but being not of it. Let us stand forth like shining beacons of goodness, grace, and holiness, trusting God for both his seen and unseen blessing and provision in a world that does not know Him.

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity

December 17
Dcn. Greg Statezni

Read Luke 18:1-30

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Luke 18:22

I want to compare the Rich Young Ruler's perception of himself with the reality of who he thought he really was. His perception was that he was in good shape when it comes to a right standing with God. He has, as far as he's concerned, done everything God required. However, the problem is this rich ruler is placing his confidence in himself rather than in Christ. He was self-exalting in that he trusted in himself and his own righteousness. That his righteousness was something he received by doing good things and doing good works. God would surely save him. Jesus goes on to promise the man treasure in heaven if he will follow Him. Notice that Jesus appeals to his desire to possess riches. Our Lord understands all of us desire to possess riches. However, we must not be tricked into thinking that earthly riches are more valuable than what we can possess Him. This man felt as if he had kept the commandments since he was a child and this was enough to get him eternal life.

But he was very sad because he was extremely rich. This is not what we hear today is it. To be extremely rich is to be extremely happy. To have it all is to be extremely joyful. Big houses and fancy cars and designer clothes and dining at nice restaurants are what make people happy. Please see this, it was his wealth that made him sad. He knew what he was doing. He understood very clearly the choice he was making. Rather than following Christ and having a treasure in heaven, he chose earthly wealth to be his god. Wealth will always ensnare our hearts. It makes us prideful in acquiring it. It gives us false assurance when we amass a large amount of it. For it causes us to trade God for stuff we clutch onto it. Every part of being rich grabs hold of our heart and pulls us away from God.

There question goes past the desires of the rich young man and asks how can anyone be saved? We know that all people give into some level of idolatry and fail to only worship God. Among all humanity, who could possibly be saved? This true assessment of mankind by those listening to Jesus moves us to the reality that there are none who can enter God's Kingdom based on merits of any kind. We must understand another facet of the Kingdom of God. Our eternal inheritance will be infinitely more valuable than anything we've sacrificed while living on earth. Jesus is also reminding His followers that they will be reimbursed many times over for anything they sacrificed for His glory while on earth. During this Advent season as we await the second coming of our Lord, we need ask ourselves do I resemble the rich young man?

Dcn. Greg ministers at Trinity

December 18th
Fr. Jack Estes

Read Isaiah 61

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...” These are the familiar words of Jesus found in Luke chapter four at the beginning of his earthly ministry, when he returned from the wilderness in the power of the Spirit. These are also the words of the prophet Isaiah writing some 700 years before Jesus was born, describing the arrival of the messiah and his call from God. When Jesus reads from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue that day, he quotes for the first portion of Isaiah chapter sixty-one. In order to receive the full impact of his quote we must include the entire chapter, set in the context of the book itself. Isaiah can be divided into three sections: 1) *The Book of the King*; 2) *The Book of the Servant*; 3) *The Book of the Anointed Conqueror*. (The Prophecy of Isaiah – Introduction and Commentary by J. Alec Motyer)

Advent means arrival and this season of advent we are living through carries with it a certain sense of longing, waiting with expectation for the completion of a promise. In this case the promise of one who would come with the anointing of God, one who will rule over all the earth and complete God’s purposes.

It was difficult for the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ time to recognize how all three could be fulfilled in one man, at one time and one place. So, they tended to focus on the kingship and restoration of the nation of Israel as the primary role of the messiah. Had they meditated more deeply on the scriptures they would have understood the sweeping magnitude given the anointed one to restore not only the nations, but the hearts and souls of all humanity. The apostles writing after the resurrection clearly understood how Jesus embodied all three portions of Isaiah’s prophecy, and how all would be fulfilled through the first and second advents of Christ. – His birth, death, and resurrection and his return at the end of the age.

The description of the Anointed Conqueror and what he will accomplish in Isaiah chapter sixty-one provides for us a beautiful portrait of Jesus himself and the fullness of messianic purpose. Namely his work of restoration in our lives. The messiah brings good news – healing of the brokenhearted, liberty to the captives, freedom from bondage and the favorable year of the Lord – the time in which all debts are canceled. He comforts those who mourn, giving oil of gladness and the strength of praise. My friends this is exactly what he is doing in your life and mine today.

The Anointed Conqueror will bring justice over all the earth and establish an everlasting covenant between God and his people. “God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations.” Can we even begin to imagine what such a time will look like? No more headlines of random death and destruction. How different from the world we experience now in this present age.

Jesus proclaimed the prophecy of Isaiah sixty-one to be fulfilled on the day he read it aloud in the synagogue in Galilee. His ministry remains consistent from that moment forward until now in this present moment. How has the messiah opened your eyes, set you free from captivity, or healed your broken heart? All this from when he began to arrive, the first advent.

Sometimes it is good for us to pause and take stock of all Jesus has done in our lives, to see the fulfillment of a prophecy from 700 years before his birth, and to know that fulfillment in our own lives 2000 years later. In doing so, it puts in anticipation of the 2nd advent, when he returns as the Anointed Conqueror over all the earth.

As you continue your devotions through this Advent season, take a few minutes to read through the first four chapters in the Gospel of Luke. When you come to chapter four, as Jesus picks up the scroll to read take a moment a flip back to the full description found in Isaiah sixty-one. Read it aloud and let the words of the prophecy have a spiritual impact in your own life. Let the concluding verses become your own testimony: “I will rejoice greatly in the Lord. My soul will exult in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation.”

Fr. Jack Estes Ministers at St. Luke's

December 19th
Dcn. Ron Christolear

Read: Luke 19:11 – 17

A few weeks ago, I was headed out of town traveling West on Hwy. 58. As I looked at the mountains ahead of me, I couldn't help but notice how close each mountain range looked in relationship to the others. As I approached the first hills, it became clear that the distance between each range was farther apart than it first appeared. This is exactly what we are dealing with in these passages.

Mark tells us Jesus' reason for telling this parable. "As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately." Jesus knew that those who were following him expected Him to take his place as King. What they didn't understand, and what Jesus wanted them to see was that the kingdom would not be immediate, and that as servants of the Lord, they would be called on to do the work they were given to do.

In this parable Jesus presents His listeners with a Nobleman who had ten servants. The rounded number ten shows that Jesus was making application to all his disciples and not merely The Twelve. Each servant is given a mina, about three months of wages. Before the nobleman leaves on his journey, he commands his servants to, "Engage in business until I come." While this seems like a simple command, upon the nobleman's return, he finds that not all of his servants followed his instructions.

The question is, "Why?" Why did one of the servants choose to disobey his master's command? The answer may lie in his description of the nobleman. "Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit and reap what you did not sow." The nobleman responds with a question, "You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? Why did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?" The answerer to this why question is simple, because the servant didn't really know his Lord.

As we await the coming of Jesus, we must ask ourselves two very important questions. Question 1. In the parable, who was the owner of the minas? The answer is, of course, the nobleman. Question 2. What was the responsibility the servants had to their Lord? Answer, to use the nobleman's minas in the way they had been instructed.

While we await the return of Jesus, we too have been given gifts to use for our Lord. What keeps us from using the treasure and talents God has given us to the furtherment of His Kingdom. Do we view Him as a task-master, waiting to steal our joy, our lives, our treasure? Perhaps it's because we miss the point that what we have does not belong to us in the first place. "All good gifts come from thee oh Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." God does want to give us good gifts, but with the understanding that we bear the responsibility to use them for His glory and for His kingdom until He returns.

Dcn. Ron ministers at Trinity

December 20th
Fr. Mark Hall

Read Luke 19:29-end

“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it” v41

One of the most challenging things for a parent is to watch his or her child suffer. It’s especially hard when the child has already made a choice and set out upon a course of action that can’t possibly end well. As much as a parent may want to intervene to minimize the consequences of their child’s bad behavior, many times it is best to let the child experience it. Many a sage agrees that the most important lessons in life come through the discomfort of pain, rather than in its absence.

Like much spiritual truth, this is easier said than done. Today we see Jesus weep over Jerusalem for the second time in Luke’s gospel. With the loving exasperation of a parent who has repeatedly shared the truth with a child that refuses to listen, Jesus is moved to tears. He aches at the thought of what is to become of the city that was to be a beacon of God’s grace to the world. Jesus conveys this parental pain earlier as he grieves for Jerusalem, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (13:35)

We see God’s heart clearly, as he tenderly longs to gather and protect those whom he has created; to shield them from the consequences of their sin. Yet their refusal to listen means that for them, there is no turning back. So Jesus weeps, and tears of love roll down his face for Jerusalem, (and for you and me). Words alone were not sufficient for the task at hand. Action needed to be taken and we can see Jesus march into the temple and cleanse it.

Neurologist and author Donald B. Calne said, “The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action, while reason leads to conclusions.” Jesus follows this pattern in our passage. He grieves over the destruction of Jerusalem, and feels the pain of this imminent loss. Then he goes directly into the Court of the Gentiles and removes the barriers that were blocking the outsider’s access to God’s grace. Granted, being the divine Son, Jesus’ heart was perfectly in tune with the Father’s timing and he did nothing of his own accord.

Advent is a time when we seek to get our hearts in tune with Jesus. That we may see the world as he sees it, that our hearts may feel his love and compassion, that we may live in step with the Holy Spirit. It is not enough to simply know the great truths of the gospel, we must also allow its tune to stir within us both joy for Jesus, and sorrow for the injustice all around us.

Today, may Jesus sow within us the loving compassion that led him to weep and take action for the life of the world on the cross that we may lovingly serve those in our midst.

Fr. Mark ministers at All Saints’

December 21st
Fr. Randy Messick

Read Isaiah 64

“Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that thou wouldst come down...!”

Isaiah begs that God would come from heaven to rescue His people. He celebrates the great and powerful works God has already done in keeping His people safe and protected from their many enemies. He celebrates the mystery of the unbelievable and, as yet, unknown good that God has prepared for those who wait for Him.

Indeed, Isaiah’s request is fulfilled, for God did come down from heaven in the person of His Son, our savior Jesus. The great and powerful works of God continued in Jesus’ ministry as he went about doing good, freeing people from bondage and healing all manner of physical and spiritual maladies, Jesus offers in himself safety and protection from all our enemies including death.

Isaiah recognizes that he is asking much from his merciful God. For Isaiah knows the iniquity of his people. He knows that based on any merit of their own they should be destroyed, not saved. But he also knows that God is a father that loves his children—the works of His own hands. Isaiah prayed for us to the Father, “Be not wroth very sore, O Lord neither remember iniquity forever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people,” and his prayer was answered in Jesus. Let us be then His people. Let us be then His children. Let us come to Him in obedience rejoicing in the work of righteousness, rejoicing with grateful hearts in love and peace.

God will rend the heavens again at the second coming of Christ. In fact, the heavens shall pass away with a great roar, and all will be made right. A new heaven and a new earth will come into being in which only righteousness will dwell. Let us live now in the promise of his second coming, free to love and obey God, knowing that if all will be made right, our faith does make it right, right now.

Fr. Randy ministers at Faith Anglican

December 22nd
Fr. Karl Dietze

Read Revelation 14

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" 14:12-13

The Book of Revelation is a series of scenes, and in this scene three angels deliver a message to the rebellious world. The message of the first angel is one of grace, "Fear God and give Him glory" (14:7). If we but do that, all will be well. But we don't, so the message of the second angel is one of destruction, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great" (14:8). Thus the message of warning from the third angel, "If anyone worships the beast...he also will drink the wine of God's wrath." This is the fate of those who will not fear God and give Him glory, but instead worship the false ideology of the beast as they pursue the things of the world (Babylon). So what does that say to the Church?

"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." Knowing the end of the story inspires us to remain faithful to Jesus. To pursue the things of this world is to pursue death. Babylon will get her own scene a little later in Revelation. She is a vision of all the wealth, splendor, and decadence that the world has to offer. She is finely dressed, beautiful, decked out in jewels, alluring and enticing. She appeals to every hunger and appetite known to humanity. But in the end she will perish, and so will all who pursue her instead of God. To "spend" our lives on the wares of Babylon is to waste them.

What are you pursuing? Are you looking for happiness and meaning in the things and ways of the world? Where do you look for true contentment, meaning, and identity? Where do you "spend" your life – your time, talent and treasure? If it is anything but Jesus, it cannot give life.

What a powerful reminder in a season that can tempt us to find our true identity and happiness outside of Jesus. This is a wonderful season of the year, and one that I personally love. But it is also a season that, if we aren't careful, can make us yearn for good things that aren't Jesus. And I'm convinced that for most people, if you peel that yearning back to see where it is coming from, it is a deep seated hunger for rest. Not just the kind of rest that comes from an exhausted collapse, but that deep, peaceful, fruitful, productive and creative rest that comes from being loved by God.

That is the rest promised to those who endure, for they will "rest from their labors." This holy season, do not seek your rest in the things, even the very good things, of the world, for they cannot truly be found there. Instead, with

Fr. Karl ministers at Trinity

December 23rd
Dcn. Leslie Arbegast

Read Luke 21:5-end

When my daughter Samantha was young, one of her favorite Christmas movies was “The Muppet Christmas Carol.” The classic Charles Dickens novel of Ebenezer Scrooge and his journey back to human kindness is entertainingly told and sung by the Muppets of Jim Henson. One song encompasses the excitement of the coming Christmas. In “One More Sleep ‘til Christmas” Bob Cratchit (Kermit the Frog) sings of the joys that Christmas will bring. Though the Cratchit’s are poor, they look forward to their humble celebration of a Victorian Christmas.

In the same way, we have been counting down the sleeps until Christmas, perhaps by an Advent Calendar, Advent candles but most importantly by studying the Biblical readings which point to the birth of Jesus. Our Advent journey has been one of learning of God’s character, in that though He was not responsible for mankind’s fall, He chose to redeem us by His own death. Psalm 130:7-8 says “O Israel, put your hope in the Lord; for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins”. Throughout our readings this Advent we see again and again God’s patience and mercy with our faith ancestors and just as they waited for the Messiah to come, we also wait for Him to come again, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his Word, I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning” (Psalm 30:5-6 NIV).

As the world waited for the Messiah to first appear, so we expect His return soon. In Luke 21, Jesus tells His disciples what will happen at the end of the age, when we will see His second Advent. He tells of trials to be endured, of catastrophes and persecution. All that evil can heap upon us to try to make us deny our Lord will occur, but the Lord will not abandon us. “All men with hate you because of Me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:17-19 NIV)

When I was young, waiting for Christmas was interminable. I did not understand that though Christmas Day is important, the work of God in the world down through the ages is what makes Christmas beautiful and thrilling. This is still the work of God through the Advent. I hope and pray that your Advent has revealed to you the love the Lord has for you, and that we will all put our Christmas in the hands of Christ.

As for Christmas, Kermit would tell us “after all, it’s only 2 more sleeps till Christmas Day.”

Dcn. Leslie ministers at St. Luke’s

December 24th
Dcn. John La Mar

Read Luke 22:1-38

“Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed how he might betray Jesus.” (Luke 22:3-4)

Eighteenth century social and political observer, Sir William Wyndham, was recorded in 1734 as saying, “It is an old maxim that everyman has his price.” And the core concept of this belief about human nature has been found among a few ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and writers. Sir William believed, from his observations, that “for the right price”, everyone was capable of betraying friends, family or their most deeply held principles. However, without a doubt, there have been and are, faithful men and women of God, who willingly endure loss, suffering and even death rather than deny Christ and the divine sovereignty of God over their being. We can truly learn from them but we can also learn from those well-known biblical figures who failed during their time of testing.

Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver; Peter denied knowing Jesus three times out of fear of being arrested and tried by the religious authorities; King David denied God’s plan and provision for his life when he lusted and took Bathsheba for himself; and many of Jesus’ disciples abandoned him when they rejected his teaching that he was the “Bread of Life”. (Ref. John 6: 60-66) Does one have to fully understand God and his ways in order to follow him? If so, then He would not be God. True believers caught up in a moment of worldliness and weakness or enemies of Christ and his work whose hearts never truly belonged to him can all teach us something.

I believe that we can learn from these named and unnamed individuals that if we are not humble before God and have our feet firmly planted on the solid ground of Christ Jesus and his Gospel then we are all poised on the precipice of doubt, sin and temptation of circumstance and ready to fall headlong into the trap of denying Christ by either “thought, word (or) deed” as we read in the General Confession of our prayer book. With utmost seriousness Jesus spoke to his disciples saying, “Whoever acknowledges (confesses) me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown (deny) before my Father in heaven.” (Matt. 10:32-33)

Let us be ever mindful to walk in integrity, full of faith and our eyes continually on Christ and remembering his last recorded words in the final chapter of the Book of Revelation, “Yes, I am coming soon.” And so, we all affirm, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20)

Dcn. John ministers at Trinity