

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Live prepared. As a second flame is kindled in our Advent wreath, we are invited as a story-formed people to listen carefully to our story about a voice crying in the wilderness: "live prepared."

Advent is a state of mind as well as a season in the church year. As a state of mind, Advent is not intended to be preparation for Christmas, the first coming of the Christ child....but rather a season in which we make present again that miraculous event as we prepare for Christ's second coming, his return to complete what he began long ago.

This Jesus, born more than two thousand years ago, entered history to proclaim and witness to that long awaited and hoped for coming of God's reign. The long awaited and hoped for kingdom of God was no longer a future promise, but a present reality. It had come, it was in sight, it had been birthed and established.

Those who believed him were to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven," and then with God's help, to act as if it has come and thereby cooperate with God so it might come in its fullness, in God's good time.

So, Advent therefore is a season which offers us the opportunity to pray for Christ's return and prepare for his second coming, when the world as we know it will end and creation as God intended it is brought to fruition.

And so, on this second Sunday of Advent, we focus our attention on the prophetic voice of John the baptizer who invites us to live prepared for Christ's second coming. How, we ask? John answers, "Repent."

Now, there was a time when to repent implied expressing deep sorrow and regret for our sins. With this understanding in mind, Advent, cloaked in purple, became much like Lent, a second penitential season. But, in our day, theologians have rightfully turned Advent into a contemplative season cloaked in blue, a season in which we are invited to contemplate future possibilities and how we might live faithfully between the times, between Christ's first and second comings, between the already and the not-yet of God's new creation.

To repent, therefore, must have a new and different meaning than it once did, namely, to reflect on the direction we are traveling both as faithful persons and as the Body of Christ, the church, and change course when necessary. We pray in acknowledging that, in God, "we live, and move, and have our being", so it is necessary in the "moving" part, that we always need to adjust in our life journey.

One understanding of what it means to repent can come from sailing. Sailors set a course for some far off destination, sometimes a destination they have heard about and dreamed of reaching and then set out in anticipation with the hope of reaching it.

On setting sail, they know that they will have to contend with the wind, the surf, tides, and

undercurrents. There will be fierce rain and dark nights without the stars to guide them. There will be times of dead calm when they drift out of control and times of severe storms in being tossed to and fro. And, getting off course often happens...sometimes even needing to turn around, but always needing to adjust course to travel in the right direction.

“Living prepared” is more than our getting ready for God to do something. It is really to reflect upon what we ask God to do in our prayers so that we might make sure that we are cooperating with God to make those prayers possible. By nature, we humans are wholly dependent on God, but also we must remember that God has chosen to be dependent on us.

From God's perspective, we followers of Jesus have lost our way and need to make dramatic changes in the direction we are sailing. Like storms at sea, our small ships, our congregations, are surrounded by conditions that point away from God's rule: a time in which poverty, homelessness, war, violence, ignorance, instability, and much more are eliminated and God's reign of justice and peace realized. We live in a world that appears to have lost a vision of new possibilities and settled for survival in this the best of all possible worlds. We have become so focused on being right, of being certain, that we are unwilling to make any changes in the course we are traveling. Too often, we forget that there is no political, no economic, no cultural system that can claim to be Christian, no nation that can claim that it knows and does God's will perfectly.

In every Advent season we are offered the opportunity to reflect on our journey and to make sure that we are sailing in the right direction. The time when every Christian disciple and every Christian congregation has a unique opportunity to recommit itself to a vision of God's reign and then focus its attention on Christ's second coming.

God's future may not always be the future we desire, the future that benefits us. Living prepared requires that the future we live for is the future God envisions, the future God desires. May we have faith in a future that transforms our imaginations and makes it possible for us to live for impossible possibilities, for dreams that correspond with God's.

Change is not possible if we believe that we are already living completely faithful lives. Repentance begins with the acknowledgment that everything is not fine, that we have been blown off course and need to make a course correction. With God's good news in our hearts, we will be enabled and empowered to live faithfully with anticipation and hope between Christ's first and second comings. Therefore, may we choose to make this Advent holy by avoiding the temptation to celebrate Christmas too soon and use these weeks to ponder where we are headed and make changes in our course, to "live prepared" along the path of righteousness in the companionship of our God, in the presence of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.