

Sermon for First Sunday of Advent
Year A
November 27, 2022
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Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 2:1-5
Psalm 122
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:36-44

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal...

So we begin again - our Advent season –
A call to discard the works of darkness and draw on the armor of light.

Sounds easy, doesn't it. You take off the dark, heavy overcoat of gloom and slip on the warm glow of goodness. But it's not easy – is it?

Who knows the weight we each carry in things we have done
and things we have left undone.

In a very literal sense, it's truly difficult to pull on the armor of light
when we already have on warm sweaters, socks, gloves, jackets, coats, hats, scarves – whatever it
takes to keep warm this season,
and it's not even winter yet.

Linda and I had to turn on the heat in our house back in October,
and last week I had to add blankets to the bed to keep warm at night.
And yet, because we have blankets and sweaters,
socks, gloves, jackets, coats, hats, scarves,
we must be thankful because there are so many who do not.
And then I feel guilty because of what I have that others do not.

And it's Advent, a time to consider our place in the world –
and just around the corner – Christmas.

Oh my, the burdens we assume at Christmas.
The armor of light is not among all the things we put on
and all we do put on this time of year
can make it difficult to “put on Christ.”

If you've been watching much television, already it's Christmas.
It's just the first Sunday of Advent, so don't get confused.

From here on out we'll be getting any number of suggestions about
the best way to cook, how to decorate, and how to reduce your stress during the holidays.

Putting on the armor of light is not among the suggestions you see on morning TV shows.
Following those instructions you'd expect you'd be able to:
find the perfect gift for everyone, perfectly redecorate for the holidays, prepare a perfect gourmet
meal for a cast of thousands,
meet every need of every member of your family,
and still lose weight in the process.

Oh the joys of a Martha Stewart Christmas.

My Aunt Mardell, God rest her soul,
used to complain about Martha Stewart:
"how's a normal person going to compete with that kind of perfection!"
Mardell was a marvelous woman. She was supportive and loving,
and I could always go to her when I was feeling down. She always pointed out the good, and never
worried about criticizing the less than perfect.
My mother, God rest her soul, was like Mardell, very loving and caring.
But during her last years, as her health began to fail,
she begged off buying us presents, and chose to give us a check instead.

It was just too stressful trying to find the perfect gift for each of us, worrying and fretting about
whether we'd like them.

Holidays are supposed to be occasions of celebration,
not stress-producing gatherings of torment.

Jesus came into this world to show us how to navigate through its chaos, using love and compassion
as our guides.

Advent prepares us to put on the armor of light
and rejoice that we have marched right into this darkness
and discovered that we are not alone.
We will be met with hope and peace and love.

That's when we shift our focus from this world.

We must take off the armor that the world demands we wear –
Cynicism, defensiveness, isolation, fear.

We are called this Advent to put on the Armor of Light:
Love, compassion, kindness, gratitude, forgiveness, acceptance, generosity.

So to prepare ourselves for Christmas,

we have two tasks in the coming weeks.

One is to prepare, to anticipate, to remember that Christ will come again.

Our other task is to look forward to the nativity of the Baby Jesus:
the divine birth of the child of God – the prince of peace.

Peace is the promise of the Psalms and the prophets.

Our Psalm today prays for peace and prosperity.

Isaiah foresees that peace will come.

“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 anymore.
O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

Advent is about the light amidst the darkness.
December is the darkest month,
and Christmas is near the darkest night of the year.
On that night – God’s light shines forth and conquers the dark.

Each week in Advent we light another candle
to increase the light we bring to the season.
Amidst the cold and the early sunset,
it’s easy to forget the brightness of the day,
and the light that is with us always.

So we prepare by doing as Paul instructs:
“salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers;
the night is far gone, the day is near.”
“Let us then lay aside the works of darkness
and put on the armor of light;
let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling in the dark.”

I’ve been thinking a lot about the armor of light.
It took a while to find an image for the bulletin
that captured something of what I envisioned.

It’d make for great special effects for a movie.
I can see the figures in dark putting on the armor made of light
and them gleaming in the darkness.

As Paul says, we can put on the Lord, like a cloak.
Wear the Lord as if God were a garment
that we could put on for our protection,

as it says in the Collect today,
“now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ
came to visit us in great humility.”

We wait upon the Lord, and while we wait,
we prepare,
we mark the days with our good works among our fellow beings
so that we can share the armor of light with all God’s creatures.

As the Psalm today closes:
“Because of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek to do you good.”

That’s our work:
To do good;
To be loving;
To show compassion;
To be kind;
To be grateful;
To be forgiving;
To be accepting of others.
And to be generous.

That’s the armor of our prince of peace.

Amen.