

The First Sunday in Advent – 2020

Isaiah 64:1-9

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 11:1-10

Some days I feel like a Four-Star Admiral. Some days I feel like a Seaman Recruit (that's the lowest grade of enlisted man in the Navy for you landlubbers). Are you like me? In the kitchen, say, sometimes you feel like you're Rachel Ray and other times you feel like you'd be an embarrassment to the E-Z Bake Oven. Up and down – some days our personal stock is over 30,000 and some days it feels like Black Friday, 1929. Some days you feel like John Wayne. Some days feeling like Pee Wee Herman would be step up. Some days you are Joan of Arc, Florence Nightingale, and Mother Theresa rolled into one dynamic persona. Some days you are a doormat, wallflower, Jan Brady soup. Most of us would prefer to feel like the former rather than the latter. Very few of us enjoy feeling like a failure.

Mood; my momma, like every other lady her age in the 1970's, had a mood ring. The principle was simple. If your body temperature was warm, your ring changed to a vibrant color. "Oh look, mom's in a good mood. Ask her to bake a chocolate cream pie." If your body temperature was low then the ring emits a warning: "don't bug me; I'm one unwelcome remark from the warpath." Mood; the evolutionary biologist will tell you that it's just a matter of serotonin in your system. High levels of serotonin lead to lustrous hair and high mood. Low levels of serotonin lead to toilet paper on the bottom of your shoe and bad mood. How's your mood? Do you think that faith has anything to do with mood? Do you think that acting on your faith (or not acting on it, or worse, acting contrary to it) has anything to do with your mood? Has 2020 been good for your mood? More importantly, has 2020 been good for your faith?

What, do you suppose, is the church's mood? As a whole, the Christian church on earth, what is her mood? Is she expectant, cheerful, vibrant? Is she depressed, anxious, afraid? If you were to see the church in her ideal state, if you were to see the church as the epitome of herself, what would you see? I see the church as full of love, elated at what the Lord Christ has accomplished, confident as she moves through time, hopeful for tomorrow, thankful for today, strong and courageous as she rehearses all of Jesus' teaching, all of His promises. There's a romantic love song that was written in 1934 – I suspect most all of you know it: I Only Have Eyes for You. It's a brilliant song that conveys a brilliant sentiment. The singer professes to be oblivious to everything going on around him. The stars might be shining brightly or it might be completely cloudy, he doesn't know. He might be in a garden or on a crowded street – he doesn't know and I get the impression that he doesn't much care. There's a reason for this obliviousness. He only has eyes for his girl; everything else fades from view because he is so enraptured with his true love. "You are here, so am I. Maybe millions of people go by but they all disappear from view. And I only have eyes for you.

Irrespective of her circumstances, the church only has eyes for Christ. When she is with Him, her mood is high. She knows who He is and what He has done, what He is doing now. Peter stepped out of the boat and was walking to Christ on the water, in the midst of storm. And Peter took his eyes off Christ – the waves, the wind, the implicit threat – Peter's eyes fixated on those things and down he went. I'm not sure what his mood was when he climbed back into the boat

but his ears were stinging: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). We fail. No doubt about it, we fail. We take our eyes off Christ and put them on the circumstance in which we are living. Does that EVER make you feel good? What was the mood of those who welcomed Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? Where were their eyes? Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the shouts of “Hosanna”. The people were elated, joyful, full of Messianic hope. This is the One! Jesus had just raised dead Lazarus. He had done awesome things and biblical prophecy was alive in the minds of God’s people. Hosanna! Save us! God had indeed visited His people. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Advent is a boon to our mood. Spirits are high today. Advent means coming. There is a prominent theme to this season and it is a tonic of joy. Coming – it is the Lord who is coming and He comes to humanity in three distinct ways. He came once, full of grace, full of humility, the Son of God came to us in our flesh. God came near by being conceived by the Holy Spirit and taking up residence in the womb of a lowly virgin. He made her womb His home. Then, He revealed His sacred face in Bethlehem – Angels streamed from on high to announce the birth of the King. Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. His first coming; He served the weak and forgotten. He healed the sick and diseased. He taught with the voice of heaven. He acted in Divine Love. He died; God died, crucified, to save you. Death is shattered, the grave... impotent, Satan is vanquished and life springs from the tomb. Christ has come, His first coming, His first advent – the historical reality upon which all life pivots. We fix our eyes on that coming and our mood is elevated; our circumstances... inconsequential.

Advent has more – His second advent, His second coming – our eyes are on that day. He promised and we pine for His return. When He comes, heaven is ours. When He comes, all of the truth will be plainly visible for everyone. When He comes, our faith is going to shine like the sun. When He returns there will be singing, there will be glory, there will be joy and fulfillment and freedom and all that God has foretold will be realized. Life to the full. No loss, no pain, no guilt, no shame, no division, no deceit, no darkness and no death. His second advent, His second coming... we wait, we prepare, and we thirst for that day. Faith is buoyed by the thought of that day arriving. The trumpet will blast, the Lord will ride the clouds with His angels and all humanity will see Him, all humanity will bend the knee, and all humanity will know the veracity of His life, His death and His resurrection; His second advent; this season before Christmas has it in view.

But this season has more; Christ is coming now. “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Christ is present with us, unseen but among us with His grace, among us with His forgiveness, with salvation, with new life. The season of advent is a cord of three strands: His first coming at Bethlehem, His promised second coming in glory on the Last Day, and His present coming to us in the Word and the Sacraments. This cord of Christ is wrapped around our hearts and makes what is cold in unbelief (fear/pessimism/anxiety/self-concern) warm with the fire of His love. We welcome Him now, our coming King, and our mood is boosted. Advent begins with our Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem to remind us that we welcome Him as the triumphant Son of David every Lord’s Day. We rehearse both His historical entrance into Jerusalem two thousand years ago and His promised return on the Last Day. Everything else, our Covid infatuation, our

political psychodrama, our Netflix diversions – it all fades from view. He boosts our mood. He only has eyes for us.

When we were small and unfavored, when we were distant, lost, He came searching for us. His love compelled Him to come, to make a manger His crib and a cross His royal throne. Nothing else but you and your salvation mattered. He came *for you*. He was born into this world to bring you to the next. You belong to Him. He is thoroughly yours. His entrance into Jerusalem led Him to be isolated, alone, and burdened. He was hailed as the King and then He was crucified on the shameful cross. Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is He, the one from whom men hide their faces. Blessed is He, the Omnipotent God who renders up His life as a sacrifice. Blessed is He, who washed His bride in His blood and has union with her in Holy Communion. He only has eyes for us – sinners, born again, born by water and the Spirit. Advent has come and it is a joy. Our mood is uplifted for Christ has come, Christ is coming, Christ will come again.