

First Sunday in Advent – 2021

Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

There are two songs from the eighties that strike a similar chord. They deal with the passing of time and looking back and treasuring what was. These songs resonate with me. Of course, in the eighties I was young, on the go, and full of life. My mind can still harken back to what that felt like. I suspect that there is a certain glow in everyone's memory when they think back to when they were young and on the go and full of life. One of the songs is by Billy Joel, titled "This is the Time." The other is by John Cougar, titled "Cherry Bomb." John Cougar writes a straightforward song about the simple but charming things of youth. He writes about what was important then, pure things, "laughin' laughin' with our friends, holding hands meant something baby; that's when a sport was a sport." He lived in the sticks but his memory is vivid regarding events, and people, and the natural adrenaline of being 17. "When I think back about those days, all I can do is sit and smile."

Billy Joel wrote these lines: "This is the time to remember, 'cause it will not last forever. These are the days to hold on to, 'cause we won't although we'll want to. This is the time, but time is gonna change." It's an old adage but time really does slip through your hands like sand in an hour glass. It isn't only youth, though, that is full of color and joy and at least a modicum of adrenaline. Reminiscing is an exercise that can increase gratitude, to be sure. But what about now? What about treasuring today? One of the saints of Christ the King died this week. Charles Baker – a stand-out here at Christ the King, I'll think we'll all agree. I was not quite ready to have Charles leave. Don't get me wrong; I am happily submissive to the Lord. All of us are on death's dance-card. The timing will be perfect for us all. To live is Christ. To die is gain (Philippians 1:21).

I am somewhat melancholy, though. I have the feeling that there was something about Charles that I missed, something that I didn't treasure appropriately. Now, he's gone and I don't have access to him. So, imagine that feeling being centered around our Lord Christ. This is a precious time for us, Christians, enjoying the favor of the Almighty, having free access to the sweetest Gospel, freedom to worship as unfettered Lutherans, forgiveness anchoring our lives to the cross of salvation and the death-shattering-empty-tomb of Jesus' Easter Triumph. We are in the spiritual high cotton. The champagne of a 2000-year-old bottle of life is cracked every Sunday. Are you treasuring today? Is the splendor of our life in Christ's church deeply embedded in your heart? Do you honestly know how good you have it? Friends in this place are abundant. Harmony, built on God's Word, holds sway here. God is so abundant with His grace. His Word is alive, teaching you, elevating you, blessing you. He could take it away. Not His grace; not the bloody cross, not the power of the resurrection, not the vibrancy of His Word or your name being written in the book of life. The relative calm in the world, the order in the heavens, the *feeling* people have that all is well; He could take it away. At some point, He will take it away.

This broken world will not last. When God's eternal watch ticks to its final hour then there will be apocalyptic signs that the world is coming unglued. "God's orderly creation will become

unstable as chaos rises and the Creator begins to withdraw His benevolence” (Just, pg. 801). How will we stand in that hour? We just baptized Layla Sophia Christina Scott. What would you like her to be like in twenty years? If you could “Erector Set” her character, her internal make-up, what would you have her be? Composed, faithful, humble, secure, giving, forgiving, gladly putting others above herself – would you have her be a young lass that brings light to a dark environment, where there is doubt, she brings faith, where there is sadness, she brings joy? How will Layla Sophia Christina get there? Will the culture around us build that kind of character in her? Will the tele or the internet or the shopping mall make a major contribution to her high character? Probably not.

The Lord is going to return. You need to be prepared. Layla Sophia Christina needs to be prepared. Things are likely to get hairy. The fear present within unbelievers will intensify. I saw a bumper sticker recently that said this: Fearful People Do Stupid Things (I smiled, widened my eyes and nodded). Unbelievers are unstable now. When it gets hairy, they will make things worse. It will be part of our Character to stand firm, to evangelize any and all to the truth, and to place all of our trust in God’s perfect plan. When should we start? We start now. We start today. We make the most of today. How will we prepare? We will drink deeply from the fount of life. God’s Word is life. Wisdom, strength, and faith spring to life in you from God’s Word. It is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). It does not return empty but accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent (Isaiah 55:11).

The opposite is to be in view as well. There are things that weaken your preparation, your agility of mind and heart, spirit and soul. “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34). Your faith is to be sharp, your mind attuned to spiritual truths, Christ is your Lord 24/7, not just on Sunday mornings. Everyone of a certain age knows the fog of drunkenness. Old TV shows and movies had drunk people drink coffee as though that solved the problem. I know that doesn’t work. Overindulgence can overpower us. Let it not be so. Train your body and your mind. “Discipline your body and keep it under control” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Whatever is true and honorable and just, whatever is lovely and commendable and excellent – think on such things (Philippians 4:8). And the God of peace will be with you. Layla Sophia Christina (what a glorious name!), that young lass may well need you. So, what will you be for her, and the many others who will be distressed as the end draws near?

Christ will make us ready. It is God who works in you, both to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13). How many of you desire to be a tool in His hand for the benefit of others? How many of you consider it an honor that has no equal that God should be at work in you, to make you wise and courageous and faithful for the time when all things reach their end – that you might help your brother, your sister? **Now** is the time to seize. Seize *this* day, this beginning of Advent, and prepare for the return of our King, the Lord of glory. Know in your heart that it may well be fearful. Know in your heart that He calls you “to straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). We are a confident people. What more inspires confidence than the Savior who died for you, bearing your sin on the apocalyptic tree, and rose again? If we don’t have confidence in Christ and His cross, then what, precisely, do we have confidence in? When the world comes unglued, it means that He is near.

“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand” (Romans 13:11b-12a). These are magnificent days. Let us take full advantage of them. Christ would have the cup of your soul runneth over – running over with His love, with a hope that is inspired from His promises. He would have your soul rich with mercy *now*, His mercy for you, for others. He labors over your heart *now*, giving you comfort when you are lonely. These are the days to hold onto for Christ is here with us. Time will change us, but it will not change Christ. He is the One who held Charles dear in this life. He holds Layla Sophia Christina and He holds you. He opens heaven. Heaven’s days are our future. “I’m warm from the memory of days to come” (This is the Time). Heaven’s days are our future. “Laughin’, laughin’ with our friends” (Cherry Bomb). Heaven is at our altar – Christ’s body and blood. He builds a community, a church, and these are very good days.