

SERMON-DECEMBER 12, 2021

Title: Walking Through Advent!

Rev. Ted Althouse

Texts: II Peter 3:3-14

Third Sunday in Advent

II Peter 3:3-14 – "Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the unGodly. ⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live Holy and Godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. ¹³ That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹⁴ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁵ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

I think that almost everyone enjoys a nice walk from time to time. I've had the wonderful opportunity to walk throughout the Holy Land on many occasions. One of the many highlights of my ministry was to walk on what is documented to be the steps that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ purportedly walked on as he was escorted into the house of Caiaphas, the high priest who organized the plot to kill Jesus. FYI: one of my Israeli guide friends got permission for me to actually walk on those same very old steps as they are off limits to the public due to age, vandalism, etc.

Then another memorable time was on one of my many trips to the poor country of Haiti. I was walking in Petit Desline...the poorest area of Port-au-Prince, Haiti...known as the slums. I remember vividly a little boy running about moving his hand up and down...stopping suddenly and raising his hands above his head in a throwing movement. Startled, I approached him and asked him what he was doing. With a little laugh and cute smile...this little boy said, in Creole, that he was playing basketball...but he didn't have a real basketball because he was so poor. So, in his mind he imagined he had a basketball and was going through all the movements that one would do if he had a real ball. And he was pretty good too. Even though this poor little lad didn't have a real basketball...what was important is that he had an imagination that allowed him to experience something that he probably wouldn't have the opportunity to do in real life.

He had a goal...a dream...a desire...hope. I took this young boy's name and promised that I'd bring him a real basketball the next time I was in the country. I did that and he was the proudest and happiest kid around because I had presented him with what seemed like a million dollars. His goal...his dream became a reality. I can't help to apply some of this logic to the season which we are celebrating right now....Advent...a time of waiting...a time of hope...of goals...of dreams and imagination...a time to walk through Advent as we celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. Let me remind you that Jesus walked everywhere during his ministry and brought hope to the world for a better future. So, I plead with you to allow your own mind to walk through special times but most of all, during our walk through Advent to find the celebration of Christ's birth be a renewed dedication to Almighty God.

As you walk through Advent to Christmas, know that there is no material gift in this world that will be given to you this Christmas (or any Christmas) that will assure of hope for the future than Jesus Christ being first in your life. The only gift that will give you this assurance of hope is the Spiritual gift which God gave to us over 2000 years ago...Jesus Christ and his unseen Holy Spirit. Advent and Christmas brings us to a time when we can recall this person of Jesus Christ and his gift of eternal life in heaven. Advent and Christmas is a time when we can explore again the spiritual direction which we are moving through. Recalling the birth of the son of Almighty God can instill within us the desire to move closer to him and receive his gift of eternal life.

So, where are you as you are walking through this Advent and Christmas season? Is this the season that you splurge on gifts, trimmings, parties and scrumptious food? Is this the season of competition for giving and receiving gifts? Do you look at Advent and Christmas as just another time in the year when Santa Claus appears in every store and brings gifts? I think you realize by now that this is the season the commercial world places tremendous emphasis upon buy buy buy and attempt to create the illusion of happiness and joy. Did you know that the Christmas season tops the list of the most depression and suicides collectively, during the four-week period leading up to and after Christmas, then any other time of the year? This happens primarily because of the many pressures placed upon oneself to produce and be better than one can be.

I'm going to help you walk through Advent as we hear and recall these words from Jesus to the apostle Peter; *"Upon this rock I will build my church"* (rock meaning Peter). Jesus also reminded Peter what the prophets had said; *"...in the last days scoffers will come. And following their own evil desires. They will say 'where is this coming, he*

promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (v3-4) Peter is saying that many people will not take the teachings of Jesus Christ and their own sinful ways seriously. The carnal (wordily) mind of many individuals will act contrary to their spiritual upbringing. Peter saw people, who knew about the Word of God as well as the teachings of Jesus Christ but because of worldly influences, were following the unhealthy devices and desires of their own heart which were contrary to God’s teachings. These are the people who will become skeptical and not seriously follow what they had been taught about Jesus Christ and his return to the earth. Peter was greatly concerned then and many spirit-filled individuals feel the same way today. Christ must be the dominate factor in all our lives.

Then Peter said these words, listen: *“do not forget this one thing, dear friends; with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”* (v8,9) Please never forget that time, as we know it to be, means nothing to Almighty God. What is important is what we are doing with our own time. We must believe God is the ultimate creator of all life and the only judge of what we do with our time and our sins. God is also patient with us, as we come to him in our self-imposed struggles of life. He is always patiently waiting for our decision to embrace him each and every day.

Then Peter asks this question: *“since everything will be destroyed (in the last days), what kind of people ought you to be?”* (v8) Here is a very valid question Peter asked (especially since he said in verse 7: *“the heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of un-Godly men”*). Peter was referring to the end times...Armageddon but is this really the time to talk about end times especially when we are walking through Advent? This is the season of celebrating the birthday of Jesus Christ...a time of joy and happiness. Peter knew very well how the people of his day were living and what they were doing and he is speaking to each of us today. Many people then and now are living the sinful life which they desire...knowing full well about Almighty God and the teachings of Jesus Christ...but still going on with life as if nothing bad will befall them.

I’m sure many of the people Peter was speaking to (and many of us today), must have asked the question; ‘so what should we be doing’? And of course, Peter had an answer for us all; *“you ought to live Holy and Godly lives, as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming”* (v11,12) Peter is telling us all that we should begin to shape up

(so to say) and find a better purer spiritual relationship with God. Do some introspection of who you really are and what you are doing as you walk through Advent and this world. Search your heart and identify who you really are and work to better yourself and your relationship with God.

Peter also said; *“...make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (God).”* (14) Is it not the desire of every Christian individual to work toward a better spiritual life of purity and perfection? A life that is less involved in the readily available sinful ways this world offers? Isn't it your desire to have a life that is closer to the walk-through Advent with God to the birthday of Jesus Christ? And so, in attempting this purity and perfection...we must be constantly developing our own special techniques and methods to obtain these spiritual goals. And this starts with the full dedication of our life to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Matthew Henry, the great bible scholar and commentator said: *“it is only the diligent Christian who will be the happy Christian in the day of the Lord”*. Let us find peace with God...the inner peace that brings a level of earthly existence transcendent unto God. Be reconciled unto God through his son Jesus Christ. The event is the celebration of the birth of the human but yet divine person...Jesus Christ. Let us continue walking through Advent to once again celebrate the birthday of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.