

I.N.I.

First Sunday in Advent
November 27, 2016
I Samuel 31:1-13

In Christ Jesus, for whose coming we prepare our hearts during this Advent season, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What do you think is the best way to prepare for Christmas? Is it getting your Christmas wish list to Mom and Dad early? Is it making sure you were out shopping on Black Friday and got the best deals or maybe doing it online this year? Maybe it is decorating outside while it is still somewhat warm before it is too cold and snowy to get them up? Perhaps it is getting the Christmas tree and decorating it as you listen to Christmas music. Maybe it's sending out Christmas cards, baking Christmas cookies, putting up an Advent calendar?

Many of these are traditional ways for us to prepare and get ready for Christmas. You may have others. But we haven't touched on the true Christmas preparation. Real Christmas preparation---

REAL PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S COMING IS REPENTANCE

In your December Newsletter, we state that during Advent we prepare for a three-fold coming of Christ---1) His coming into this world in human flesh, as a little Baby, to take our place; the Son of Man; celebrating His incarnation and birth.

- 1) His coming as Savior into our hearts through faith.
- 2) His coming again as Judge into this world to take us to heaven.

The deciding factor on how we receive and welcome Christ in this three-fold coming is **REPENTANCE!** If we only look upon the Christmas story of Jesus' birth as a beautiful folk tale; a wonderful legend of long ago on the par with Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," then we will never receive Jesus as our Savior in our hearts and then His coming into this world as Judge will be a fearful end for us.

But if we with properly prepared hearts—hearts filed with repentant sorrow because of our sins; look upon the Christmas story as the greatest gift ever given: God's Son given to man; wrapped up in human flesh and blood, born in order to live a perfect life for us and born in order to die as the Sacrificial payment for our sins—then we will receive Jesus into our hearts as our Savior from sin, and then we will eagerly look forward to that glorious day of Christ's return to Judge all of mankind and take us to be with Him in heaven.

This morning's sermon text has a lot to say about repentance.

Last week we heard how Saul had fallen from being a humble, faithful king to a proud, disobedient king. His collapse came about through his sinful ego and pride which led to disobedience; which led to rebellion against God; which led to hypocrisy—putting on a show of piety and sacrificing to God without love---which revealed an unrepentant, unbelieving heart; which led to death, eternal death and damnation in hell.

This was the sad course that Saul followed. His life is one of the saddest accounts in all of Scripture. Here was a man who had so much going for him. He started out humble and obedient. He was not important in his own eyes. He was chosen to be king over God's people. He was at one time filled with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that he even prophesied. In Samuel he had a faithful prophet to lead him, guide him and encourage him. He had a loving and caring, faithful son in Jonathan. But he lost it all when he rejected the Lord as being his Lord.

Saul became # 1 in his heart and not the Lord God. As we heard in our first Scripture reading, this rejection of the Lord led Saul away from God and His Word. When Saul did call out to the Lord in despair; it was with a heart of faithless fear, not a heart of repentant faith. Therefore God did not listen to him or answer him. And in this darkness, in his unbelief, he turned to the very source that now owned him; Satan. He turned to a witch. Witchcraft and sorcery are products and servants of the Devil. Saul earlier in his rule as king banned all witchcraft and sorcery from Israel. Now he turns to them for help. How far the unrepentant fall.

Even after Saul had his fate revealed to him, he did not cast himself at the feet of His Lord God with a broken heart and in repentance admit to his sins and lay them upon the Messiah who was to come. He did not seek forgiveness, instead he blindly headed into destruction and as our text says in

despair he fell on his own sword and killed himself. In Saul's case this was the last act of an unrepentant, unbelieving heart.

How important is repentance in your life? What does Jesus say? **“UNLESS YOU REPENT, YOU WILL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH.”** Repent and live!

Repentance in the broad sense as it is often used in the Bible means—a godly sorrow over our sins and a trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness. It means far more than just being sorry for sins. Sorrow over sins can come about for several reasons.

- 1) We're sorry we were caught.
- 2) We're sorry we failed at what we were trying to do.
- 3) We're sorry we hurt someone.
- 4) We're sorry we embarrassed our family, friends and ourselves.

True repentance is godly sorrow; that is more than a ritual observance or an outward confession. It is something that takes place in the heart. Literally it means “a complete change of heart and mind.” Sorrow over sin is a remorse that is worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit through the voice of the Law that condemns the sinner. Faith is the response and reaction of the heart to the voice of the Gospel; the Good News of full and free forgiveness in Christ. Without this there is no life! No life spiritually or eternally!

The Augsburg Confession, one of our Lutheran Confessions states: *Now strictly speaking, repentance consists of two parts. One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel and believes that for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven. The conscience is comforted and we are delivered from sins terrors.*

Without repentance there can be no faith. Without godly sorrow over sins there can be no trust in Jesus for forgiveness of sins. Jesus said, **I HAVE NOT COME TO CALL THE RIGHTEOUS, (those who believe themselves to be without sin and therefore do not repent), BUT SINNERS TO REPENTANCE.**

How did John the Baptist prepare the way for the coming Messiah/Savior? By preaching **“REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL.”**

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven He commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations. That is the message that we preach as well.

As we begin our Advent preparation; a preparation for the celebration of Christ's coming into this world in the flesh; let us examine ourselves with the Law. Let the voice of God's Law speak to us, showing us our sins and faults, our breaking of God's commandments again and again and again in thought, word and deed. We have failed to live as loving people to each other and to our family, friends, neighbors and strangers, instead loving ourselves more than others. We have failed to give God all glory and honor in our lives, and instead reserved praise and glory for ourselves. We have failed to meet the demands of perfection in our thoughts in regard to sexual lust, holy desires, and perfect contentment. We have failed to put a leash on our tongues in our gossip about others, in our lies, in our talking back and sassing our parents and those in authority and in our misuse of God's name. We have failed to put God first in our life so many times everyday.

The Law weighs heavy on our hearts. Like a mirror it reflects and shows us our ugly heart, a sin blackened heart of deceit, arrogance and selfishness. The Law strikes terror into our hearts, leading us to realize that we have repaid our unselfish, loving Savior---who gave His blood for us---repaid Him with neglect, disobedience, shame, rebellion and lovelessness.

Realizing all of this from the Law, we need to look to the Good News of our Savior and cast ourselves at the foot of His cross fully trusting in His undeserved love that announces that our sins are paid in full! We rely completely upon Christ's purchased and won redemption through His death upon the cross.

By doing this we are prepared for Christ's coming; for He comes into our hearts through repentant faith worked in us by the Holy Spirit, then we will properly celebrate Christmas as the Father's great gift of His Son, our Savior and Lord and then we also are prepared for His second coming at the end of time to judge all people. Then we can truly sing **Joy to the world, the Lord has come!**

THAT IS TRUE, PROPER CHRISTMAS PREPARATION

Saul despaired, in terror of conscience he did not know where to look for help, for forgiveness,

for life and he plunged to his eternal destruction.

Thank God that the Holy Spirit has worked in us the faith and trust to despair of ourselves and in terror of conscience look to Christ in repentant faith and receive a cleansed conscience and heart.

So without further delay, let us properly prepare for Christ's coming, not only during this Advent season, but everyday, by rising and with hearts touched by God's Word make confession of our sins as found on page 47 in our hymnals and receive the announcement of forgiveness in Christ.

Amen.