

Title: Laying Spiritual Anchors

Subtitle: Remembering where we have come from and knowing where we are going prepares us for Christ's return.

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/6jlcXBkgQVU>

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. In Latin, the word Advent means “coming.” Therefore, this is a season of the Church year that anticipates the coming of Christ. The assurance that Christ will indeed come again is the essence of our Christian Hope. This hope acts much like an anchor. It rests deep in the water and prevents us from drifting with the currents, yet it can be raised in order to sail into the future. The currents of our culture can swiftly carry us along during this season. There is no other season that is as hurried as this season. Its commercialism, parties, and rush can pull us away from what this season is meant to bring us. Therefore, we need spiritual anchors to keep us from drifting and losing perspective.

One of the things that we use that helps us to keep our perspective are traditions and liturgies, like the one we just began with the lighting of the Advent Wreath. It reminds us of the hope we have in Christ that will grow and grow each week as it leads us to the celebration of the incarnation of Christ on Christmas Eve.

There is something about our liturgies and traditions that help us. They remind us who we are and where we are going. This season of the year reminds me of what it looks like when I look out the side window of my car when I am going sixty miles an hour. Looking straight out the side window at how fast things are going by, everything looks like one big blur. It is when I look forwards or backward that the landscape can come into focus.

One of the things that I love about this season is the memories this season evokes. Today, after church, Ellen and I plan to put up our Christmas decorations in anticipation of the

coming holiday. As ornaments are unpacked, each one represents a treasure that our past Christmas's have imparted. Memories of where we have lived and where we have been. Those memories help establish a foundation for who we are in the present, and they give us an identity that prepares us for our future.

Therefore one of the things that we love to do when we get together is to tell stories. And as the same stories get told and retold, especially by my children, they seem to love adding the often humorous ways that ground us in our humanity.

In the church, our past is rooted in what Christ has done for us. In it, we remember that “God has so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” We this in mind, we can embrace our humanity, with all of its defects and shortcomings, because we know that despite everything, we are still loved. We can know that he has redeemed us and chosen us to be his own. And with this, he has given us a glorious destiny. That is why we need these traditions to guide us, root us, and point us towards our future.

Our memories and traditions function much like a surgeon who carefully stitches together parts of a body so that it can be whole again. These traditions are aided by hymns that poetically retell our story. There is an old Hymn written by J. Wilbur Chapman called “One Day.”¹

One day the trumpet will sound for His coming,
One day the skies with His glories will shine;
Wonderful day, my beloved ones bringing;
Glorious Savior, this Jesus is mine!

We celebrate the fact that our God is for us, and he is not against us. And “One Day” he will bring to the fulfillment all that

¹ Written in 1910 by J. Wilbur Chapman, music by Charles H. Marsh.

the prophets have spoken. The scriptures tell us that “***everyone who has that hope purifies himself just as he is pure.***” And “***when he appears, we will be like him, we shall see him as he is.***”²

He is the Alpha and Omega the beginning and end. Paul tells us that in him, all the promises of God find their fulfillment. Therefore, the chief end of humankind points towards the purpose of glorifying God and enjoying him forever.

But living into this reality during the present time, with all of its strife, is no easy task. That is why we have the epistles. They show us what it takes to live into the Christian life and faith.

As I looked at the New Testament lesson from Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, I asked the question, “How did Paul make such an impact on this Church?” Of all the letters to the churches that he wrote, in this one, Paul gives you get a glimpse into his heart. He holds nothing back in expressing his love for them. And even when he brings reproof, they could take and receive it because they knew that he loved them. They could take it because they knew that here was someone who identified with them and cared for them. He didn’t simply stand afar off preaching platitudes. He was one with them in their struggles. And as a result, they were able to hear what he had to say. They were willing to hear both words of reproof and words of encouragement. In it, he prays, “***...may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless***

² 1 John 3:2

before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.³

The second coming of Christ is referred to in each chapter of that particular book. The Gospel read today also depicts this theme. It imparts a realism about the various trials we will face as the days of his coming draw near. Jesus said, ***“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.***⁴ The sea and the waves were symbols and metaphors for nations that will be in turmoil due to adverse winds and circumstances blowing against them. But with these warnings also comes the encouragement that ***“when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.***⁵ This hope encourages us to “stay awake at all times, praying” that we may avoid the temptation to lose heart during such tumultuous times. The God of all hope is at our side. Therefore we can face the future confidently knowing that “he that will come, will come, and will not tarry.”⁶ And one day, we will see him face to face. So let’s encourage each other and all the more as we see the day approaching. *Amen.*

³ 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

⁴ Luke 21:25

⁵ Luke 21:31

⁶ Hebrews 10:37