

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2009

Prepare for the Lord

Texts: Luke 3:1-6, Philippians 1:3-11

Throughout Advent we hear that we are to be preparing for the coming of our Lord. But what does that look like? Do we have any experiences in this lifetime which would help us prepare for Christ's coming?

As Pittsburgh prepared for the G-20 Summit, it became apparent that much money, skill, and effort was put into getting ready for the leaders of many nations to gather. I certainly do not know the details, but I know that downtown Pittsburgh was "spruced up" quite a bit, that security was very strict, and that traffic was congested in the days before the event. No one was able to get into downtown Pittsburgh without authorization during the summit itself. So if you drove past on the parkway, you could see that there was little to no traffic downtown during the summit. You also knew not to try to get off a downtown exit since National Guard Humvees were blocking them. Obviously security was tight.

Apparently to prepare for just the president of the United States to visit is quite some work. Winston-Salem State University's Center for Community Safety made plans to receive the President for a meeting at the Loewy Building. They only had five days to prepare because the visit was not confirmed until within a week. Even though preparations were mostly made, the final confirmation of a presidential visit does not come until 48 to 24 hours before it happens. Three days before the visit, the Secret Service showed up. Of course no details on all their security measures could be divulged to prevent jeopardizing future security, but they inspected every area of the building. The conference room windows needed to be covered with protective shielding, electrical circuits were added for lights and press equipment, all heating/ cooling/ plumbing/ electrical systems were checked carefully. A fire inspection took place and detailed drawing of the building was made. Two days before the visit was clean up time. Not simply normal housecleaning, but carpet cleaning and paint touch ups made. Also landscaping was done including trimming trees and weed whacking. Just as the property owner thought that everything was almost ready, he received a banner from the Whitehouse. It was a little bit of a problem to hang the banner on a brick wall, but it was done.

As everyone in the building got excited about the president visiting, almost none of them even got to see the president. All tenants were mandated to remain in their own suites and were even escorted to and from the restrooms that day. Those in the offices adjacent to where the president would be were vacated long before his arrival.¹ But all went well!

All of this does not even take into account how the roads and airports are prepared and closed when the president comes through them. But how does this compare to preparing for Christ's coming?

While in our gospel lesson, John is the only one crying out about preparing for the Lord to come. He is definitely not the secret service and obviously cares little about how "dressed up" the area and the

people are. John is dressed in camel's hair. So unlike a bride or even a groom preparing for the most important day in her or his life, John is not telling us to get dressed up. He is not concerned about home owners checking for paint flaws nor does he even address creature comforts of heating and cooling. Instead he wants us to look good from the inside out. We are to prepare for Christ by repenting of our sins. Even though when Jesus started to preach there was only John preparing people for his coming, for centuries the prophets had been foretelling Jesus' arrival. Malachi and other prophets were trying to get people prepared long before Jesus' arrival on earth. All were trying to get the faithful prepared by looking at how they are living their daily lives and changing the sinful actions we take.

We prepare during Advent both for celebrating our Lord's coming to the earth but also for the second coming of Christ. How do we prepare? We do not worry about tightening security for Christ to come. I believe that the Lord of Life can safely come among even the worst the world has to offer and be safe! We definitely do not vacate wherever Christ is coming to. Well maybe we do. After all, we are promised that Christ is present whenever two or three are gathered in his name, but our churches are not overflowing every Sunday when Christ is present with us. But we would never ask anyone without security passes to avoid coming to see the Lord. Instead as Paul writes to the Philippians, we are to living "so that [our] love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help to determine what is best..." (Phil 1:9-10).

We prepare by doing what God has told us to do all along. We try to follow God's rules because the commandments are a guide for how to live our lives. Even though we fail and do not fully live out any of the Big Ten, we still work toward putting God first and making our relationships to our family and neighbor's pure and whole. When we live by the love of God, we are reaching out to help those in the most need – the sick, the poor, the widows, and the orphans, any in need. Our love overflows so that people know who Christ is through our words and actions.

This is how we prepare. The ways are made straight not by bulldozers and dynamite but by our acts of love and kindness. It starts with a hard look in the mirror realizing where we are all failing and then responding to God's love and grace. But when do we start? How do we know when Christ is coming?

I know that the owner of the Loewy building thought he had short notice of the President's visit with less than a week. Even with months to prepare, Pittsburgh felt stressed about getting ready not for the President by many world leaders for the G-20 Summit, but we have no notice at all. In one sense, we have a whole lifetime to prepare because we trust and confess that Christ will come again. But in another sense, we have no time to prepare. Christ's coming will be without primarily visits, without banners, and without any warning at all. So prepare today! Return to God's ways and let your love overflow for the world to see and experience.

ⁱ From: <http://www.allbusiness.com/management/220672-1.html> Hail to the Chief: Preparing your Property for a Presidential Visit, by Esther L. Manewith on 12-5-09.