

"PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD"

Dec. 3, '89

Isaiah 40:3-5  
Matt. 25:1-13

"THE VOICE OF HIM THAT CRIETH IN THE WILDERNESS, PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD." SO SAID THE PROPHET ISAIAH.

"THEN SHALL THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN BE LIKENED UNTO TEN VIRGINS WHICH TOOK THEIR LAMPS, AND WENT FORTH TO MEET THE BRIDEGROOM. AND FIVE OF THEM WERE WISE, AND FIVE WERE FOOLISH." SO SAID JESUS IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW.

TODAY IS DECEMBER 3rd. THE MERCHANTS ARE ALREADY TELLING US THE TIME IS RUNNING OUT, THAT THERE ARE ONLY 21 SHOPPING DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS. HAVE YOU YET GIVEN ANY THOUGHT TO THE PREPARATION YOU WILL MAKE FOR THIS HOLIDAY? THERE ARE PRESENTS TO BE PURCHASED, CHRISTMAS CARDS TO BE SENT, ORNAMENTS TO BE HUNG IN THE HOME, HOLIDAY FOODS TO BE BAKED AND PACKED AWAY IN THE FREEZER, A FIR TREE TO BE BROUGHT HOME AND DECORATED.

ALL OF US SPEND MUCH TIME EACH YEAR PREPARING OUR HOMES AND OUR SCHEDULES FOR CHRISTMAS. BUT, PROPORTIONATELY, DO WE SPEND MUCH TIME AT ALL PREPARING OUR HEARTS TO RECEIVE THE CHRIST CHILD? THE CHRISTMAS SEASON AUTOMATICALLY BRINGS INTO OUR LIVES MUCH CLUTTER AND BUSYNESS, BUT DO WE ALSO ALLOW IT MUCH OPPORTUNITY TO BRING INTO OUR LIVES ANY SPIRITUAL BEAUTY AND PEACE, ANY REFRESHMENT AND RENEWAL OF SOUL?

THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS ARE APPROACHED ALMOST LIKE A WAR TO BE WAGED IN THE COUNTDOWN OF DAYS THAT PRECEDE CHRIST'S BIRTH, SUPPLIES ARE REQUISITIONED, ELABORATE STRATEGIES ARE CONCOCTED AND THE FAMILY, LIKE DUTIFUL TROOPS, ARE DEPLOYED TO VARIOUS EVENTS, CELEBRATIONS, AND PARTIES. WHEN CHRISTMAS MORNING HAS COME AND GONE, THE HOUSE TRULY LOOKS LIKE A BATTLEFIELD OF DEBRIS - WRAPPING PAPER RIPPED AND CRUMPLED; POTS, DISHES, AND SILVERWARE ENCRUSTED WITH FOOD SCRAPS; CHRISTMAS PRESENTS, LIKE THE SPOILS OF A GREAT CAMPAIGN, HEAPED AND PILED IN A CORNER.

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, HOWEVER, THOSE OF US WHO PASS THROUGH SUCH A HECTIC CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY FEEL MORE LIKE THE CONQUERED THAN THE CONQUERORS, MORE LIKE THE VICTIMS THAN THE CELEBRANTS. HOW MANY OF US GET DEPRESSED AND FEEL LET DOWN AS THE HOLIDAYS VANISH? HOW MANY OF US QUIETLY ALLOW OURSELVES A SIGH OF RELIEF THAT IT IS FINALLY OVER? HOW MANY OF US ARE AT LEAST



DIMLY AWARE THAT SOMEHOW THE REAL SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS HAS PASSED US BY?

CHRISTMAS IS BIG BUSINESS TODAY. IT IS A GOOD EXCUSE TO EXCHANGE GREETINGS WITH PEOPLE WE HAVE NOT CONTACTED FOR A YEAR. IT IS AN ANNUAL HIGH RITUAL OF GENEROSITY, SPENDING, AND MERRY-MAKING. OCCASIONALLY, THOUGH, IN SANER, LESS PRESSURED MOMENTS, WE ARE GIVEN ~~TO~~ WONDER WHETHER THIS IS WHAT CHRIST WAS REALLY BORN FOR. AS THE OLD SPECULATION GOES, IF CHRIST CAME BACK TODAY, WOULD HE FEEL MUCH SYMPATHY AT ALL WITH THE HIGHLY STRUCTURED PHENOMENON MOST OF US KNOW AS CHRISTMAS?

TO DERISIVE THE SUPERFICIALITY AND MATERIALISM THAT ERODE OUR MODERN CHRISTMAS IS AN OLD CHANT. CERTAINLY YOU HAVE HEARD IT BEFORE AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR, LIKE A FAMILIAR CADENCE FROM AN OLD AND BATTERED DRUM. YOU KNOW THE BEAT WELL, BUT HAS IT BECOME SO FAMILIAR AND SO MUCH A PART OF THE GENERAL BACKGROUND CLATTER OF CHRISTMAS NOISE THAT YOU HAVE LONG SINCE IGNORED IT?

I HAVE A VISION OF JESUS CHRIST IN MODERN DRESS, WALKING UNRECOGNIZED THROUGH CITY STREETS IN MID-DECEMBER. POISING AS AN INTERVIEWER, HE ASKS PASSERBY WHAT IS FOREMOST ON THEIR MINDS AT THIS TIME OF YEAR. ONE MAN SAYS THAT HE IS RUSHING HOME EARLY TO WATCH TELEVISION. HE WANTS TO SEE THE COMMERCIALS TO LEARN ABOUT THOSE STRANGE TOYS ~~HIS~~ KIDS HAVE BEEN BEGGING HIM TO BUY FOR CHRISTMAS. THE MAN LOOKS AT JESUS WITH A PUZZLED EXPRESSION AND ASKS, "AH YOU DO NOT HAPPEN TO KNOW WHAT TRIVIAL PURSUIT IS, DO YOU? OR WHERE I CAN BUY IT?"

JESUS SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS, ADMITS THAT HE DOES NOT KNOW, AND THE MAN HURRIES ON. NEXT JESUS ENCOUNTERS A WOMAN WHO TELLS HIM THAT TO HER CHRISTMAS IS ALWAYS A COLOSSAL HEADACHE. SHE EXPLAINS THAT SHE WORKS IN THE POST OFFICE, SORTING MAIL, SHE LAUNCHES INTO A WHOLE STRING OF UNPLEASANT COMMENTS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO MAIL THEIR CARDS LATE. BUT JESUS POLITELY CUTS HER OFF TO TALK TO A YOUNG GIRL. THE YOUNG GIRL TELLS JESUS THAT WHAT SHE LIKES BEST ABOUT CHRISTMAS BESIDES PRESENTS, OF COURSE IS SNOOPY FLYING HIS DOG HOUSE IN THE SNOW.

NEXT JESUS TALKS TO AN OLDER MAN. HE SAYS THAT CHRISTMAS TO HIM IS A TIME WHEN THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN BE TOGETHER. WITH A GLIMMER OF HOPE, JESUS ASKS HIM "WHAT DO YOU DO TOGETHER AS A FAMILY? DO YOU SING CHRISTMAS CAROLS? DO YOU PRAY? DO YOU READ THE BIBLE? DO YOU GO TO CHURCH?" THE MAN LOOKS AT

JESUS A LITTLE STRANGELY. HE THEN REPLIES CAUTIOUSLY, "NO, WE WATCH BALL GAMES TOGETHER ON TELEVISION." THOROUGHLY DISCOURAGED, JESUS WALKS ON, THEN HE TURNS TO HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN AND ASKS, "DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT TRIVIAL PURSUIT IS?"

EACH ONE OF US KNOWS WELL THAT CHRISTMAS SHOULD FIRST AND FOREMOST BE A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE. BUT OFTEN AT THIS SEASON WE CLOG OUR LIVES WITH THINGS AND SECULAR EVENTS. WE SAY THAT CHRISTMAS IS THE BLESSED REMEMBRANCE OF GOD'S INCARNATION IN OUR WORLD, BUT DOES THAT KNOWLEDGE GO MUCH DEEPER THAN THE RECOGNITION LEVEL? THERE IS A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KNOWING A FACT AND LIVING IT. THERE IS A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GIVING INTELLECTUAL ASSENT TO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT AND LETTING THAT SPIRIT ENTER OUR LIVES.

SOME PEOPLE KNOCK THEMSELVES OUT WITH CHRISTMAS SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES. THEY BEGIN CHRISTMAS EVE ALL TUCKED OUT, BUT EXPECTING THAT MIRACULOUSLY "OUT OF THE BLUE" THEY WILL BE GRIPPED BY THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, HOWEVER, THEY ARE DISAPPOINTED. PERHAPS THERE WILL BE A FEW WARM AND NOSTALGIC MOMENTS AS THEY LISTEN TO A FAVORITE CHRISTMAS CAROL OR SIT IN FRONT OF THEIR CHRISTMAS TREE AT HOME, BUT WILL THAT HEART FLUTTER THEY EXPERIENCE BE ANYTHING MORE THAN JUST TEMPORARY? WILL IT SURVIVE CHRISTMAS DAY TO CARRY THEM INTO EVEN THE NEXT WEEK?

THERE IS A BASIC IRONY HERE. IT HAS TO DO WITH PREPARATION. NONE OF US WOULD EXPECT A CHRISTMAS PARTY TO HAPPEN IN OUR HOMES IF WE DID NOT FIRST MAKE DETAILED PREPARATIONS FOR IT. SO WHY DO WE EXPECT THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF OUR CHRISTMAS TO HAPPEN WITHOUT PREPARATION? INSTEAD OF MAKING PLANS TO INVITE GOD INTO OUR LIVES AT CHRISTMAS TIME, MUST WE ALWAYS THINK THAT HE WILL CREATE HIS LOVE IN OUR HEARTS OUT OF ABSOLUTELY NOTHING?

I CHOSE AS OUR N.T. LESSON THIS MORNING JESUS PARABLE OF THE 10 VIRGINS. SPECIFICALLY, THIS PARABLE TEACHES US ABOUT THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST, WHICH THE N.T. UNDERSTANDS TO BE A REAL EVENT OF THE FUTURE. IN OUR ADVENT OBSERVANCES, WE RECOGNIZE THE SENSE OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING, BUT WE ALSO HAVE A BELIEF THAT IS INTIMATELY RELATED TO IT, NAMELY THAT CHRIST ALSO COMES TO US SPIRITUALLY, IN THE PRESENT. THUS JESUS' PARABLE IS APPLICABLE IN ITS BROADEST SENSE TO ALL WHO AWAIT CHRIST, IN THE PRESENT, AS WELL AS IN SOME FUTURE TIME. THE THEME OF JESUS' PARABLE IS PREPARATION. FIVE VIRGINS WERE



WISE AND PREPARED. FIVE VIRGINS WERE FOOLISH AND UNPREPARED. THE FIVE FOOLISH VIRGINS ARE LIKE PEOPLE WHO RUSH HEADLONG INTO CHRISTMAS, EMOTIONALLY PSYCHED-ED TO PLUNGE INTO THEIR CHRISTMAS ROUTINE, THEY HAVE ENOUGH SPUNK TO REACH THE THRESHOLD OF CHRISTMAS EVE'S MEANING, BUT SOON THEIR LAMPS GO OUT.

THEY HAVE NO SPIRITUAL STAYING POWER TO CARRY THEM BEYOND THE DOOR. WITHOUT HAVING MADE PROPER SPIRITUAL PREPARATIONS BEFOREHAND, THEY WILL NOT ENTER THE DEEPER MEANINGS OF CHRISTMAS. WHEN THE BRIDEGROOM FINALLY COMES, THEY WILL BE OFF SOMEWHERE ELSE EMOTIONALLY TRYING TO CATCH THEIR BREATHS OR CAPTURE A FEW MOMENTS OF PEACE.

YOU WILL NOTE IN JESUS' PARABLE THAT THESE FIVE VIRGINS ARE NOT CALLED EVIL OR UNGODLY OR HYPOCRITES. THEY ARE SIMPLY FOOLISH. THEY ARE MISGUIDED. BECAUSE OF THEIR LACK OF FORETHOUGHT, THEY HAVE WASTED THEIR OPPORTUNITY FOR WHICH THEY OTHERWISE SEEMED SO EAGER.

IN THE PARABLE, THE FIVE FOOLISH VIRGINS IMPLORE THE FIVE WISE VIRGINS TO SHARE THEIR RESERVE QUANTITIES OF OIL, WHICH THEY REFUSE TO DO. SOME WOULD BE CRITICAL OF WHAT APPEARS TO BE A LACK OF GENEROSITY ON THE PART OF THE FIVE WISE VIRGINS. BUT IS NOT THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE THAT SOME THINGS IN LIFE CANNOT BE SHARED, THAT NO ONE CAN HAND OVER HIS OR HER OWN SPIRITUAL PREPARATIONS TO MAKE UP FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S LACK? A WIFE CAN ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY, BUT THIS IS NOT AN ADEQUATE SUBSTITUTE FOR HER HUSBAND'S LACK OF ATTENDANCE. CAN SHE BE RELIGIOUS FOR BOTH OF THEM? IN JESUS' PARABLE, THE POINT IS THAT IN PREPARING FOR HIS COMING, WE ARE ON OUR OWN. WE CAN INFLUENCE ONE ANOTHER, BUT NO ONE CAN BE SPIRITUAL FOR US. THAT IS OUR OWN PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

THE FIVE FOOLISH VIRGINS WHO ARE UNPREPARED FOR THE COMING OF THE BRIDEGROOM HAVE COUNTERPARTS IN OTHER TEACHINGS OF JESUS. IN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER THEY ARE THE SOIL THAT HAD NO DEPTH OF EARTH FOR THE SEED TO TAKE ROOT IN. IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, THEY ARE THE FOOLISH BUILDER WHO CONSTRUCTED HIS HOUSE ON THE SAND, WHICH WAS SOON TO WASH AWAY. THROUGH THESE IMAGES IT IS JESUS' POINT THAT, LIKE SO MANY OTHER THINGS IN LIFE, IF ONE'S SPIRITUAL LIFE IS TO BE FRUITFUL AND WORTHWHILE, IT REQUIRES PREPARATION, IT REQUIRES EFFORT.

WHAT CAN YOU DO SPIRITUALLY TO PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD IN THIS ADVENT SEASON? FIRST, ABOVE ALL ELSE, YOU MUST CONSISTENTLY

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SET ASIDE TIME BY YOURSELF ALONE TO PRAY. MORE THAN JUST A RESPITE FROM A HECTIC ROUTINE, TREAT THIS AS A GENUINE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNE WITH GOD. FIND A COMFORTABLE PLACE AWAY FROM ALL DISTURBANCES AND CLOSE YOUR EYES. LET YOUR THOUGHTS FLOW. IF YOU NEED A STIMULUS TO YOUR PRAYING, USE A DAILY DEVOTIONAL BOOK. WHEN YOU FEEL RELAXED, CONCENTRATE ON THE QUESTION. "WHAT IS IT THAT GOD WOULD HAVE ME LEARN OR FEEL OR DO IN THIS SPECIAL SEASON OF HIS INCARNATION? CONCENTRATE ON THE QUESTION AND EXPECT THAT YOU WILL BEGIN TO FIND AN ANSWER TO IT.

SECOND, LOOK FOR SOME HARD FEELING, SOME RESENTMENT, OR SOME MISDEED IN YOUR LIFE THAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY OF YOUR RESPONDING TO GOD'S LOVE. TAKE WHATEVER STED YOU NEED TO CLEAR IT AWAY. CONFESS IT TO GOD AND TALK ABOUT IT WITH THE PERSON INVOLVED, OR MAKE AN EFFORT TO DO SOME SPECIAL KINDNESS THAT WILL BEGIN TO COMPENSATE FOR WHATEVER IT IS THAT BOTHERS YOU. IT IS NOT WITHOUT SOUND SPIRITUAL REASONING THAT JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARED THE WAY OF THE LORD BY PREACHING REPENTANCE. WHEN WE ARE NOT RIGHT WITH OURSELVES, OUR NEIGHBORS, OR OUR GOD, SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND REFRESHMENTS ARE SEVERELY INHIBITED. ONLY A CLEAR HEART CAN WELCOME A CLEAR BLESSING.

THIRD, PLAN TO SHARE YOUR CHRISTMAS PREPARATIONS WITH OTHERS. MAKE A SPECIAL EFFORT TO ATTEND THE WORSHIP SERVICE OF YOUR CHURCH DURING ADVENT. BRING THAT SUNDAY EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR OWN HOME DURING THE WEEK BY USING A HOME ADVENT WREATH. TAKE TIME EACH WEEK WITH YOUR FAMILY TO FOCUS ON THE WREATH. AS IT IS SYMBOLIC OF CHRIST'S COMING, USE THE BIBLE IN YOUR REFLECTIONS. CONSIDER ~~THE~~ DEPTH WHAT DIFFERENCE IT MAKES TO YOUR LIFE THAT YOU HAVE A GOD, THAT CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD AS A HUMAN BABY, THAT EVEN TWO THOUSAND YEARS AFTER THE OCCURANCE, YOU STILL CELEBRATE HIS BIRTH.

TRUE, IT IS AN OLD AND BATTERED DRUM THAT BEATS ITS CADENCE AT CHRISTMAS TIME. BUT NOW AS MUCH AS EVER, WE NEED TO HEED ITS MESSAGE: "PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE STRAIGHT IN THE DESERT A HIGHWAY FOR OUR GOD."



WATCH

THEREFORE

Matthew 24:42



FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT, DECEMBER 3, 1989

MORNING WORSHIP SERVICE  
FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 3, 1989

10:30 AM

PREPARATION OF OUR HEARTS FOR WORSHIP

"Let the people be in silent meditation  
and prayer upon entering the sanctuary."

WE PRAISE GOD

ORGAN PRELUDE

Organist

CHORAL INTROIT "For Jesus Christ is Born" Chancel Choir

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\*HYMN OF PRAISE "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" # 168

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: Lord, one of the great lessons we must learn is  
to share.

People: Give us generous hearts.

Leader: We must share our possessions and our time.

People: Give us generous minds.

Leader: We must share the good news of your salvation.

People: Give us the courage to witness.

WE CONFESS OUR SINS

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (In Unison)

God of the future: you are coming in power to bring nations  
under your rule. We confess that we have not expected your  
kingdom. We have lived casual lives, and ignored your promised  
judgement. Judge us, O God, for we have been slow to serve  
you. Forgive us, for the sake of your faithful servant Jesus,  
our Savior, whose triumph we want and eagerly wait for. Amen.

DECLARATION OF PARDON

\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH: "The Apostles' Creed" p 12  
The Hymn Book

LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES Mr. and Mrs. William Ponder  
and family

WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD

ANTHEM "E'en So, Lord Jesus, Quickly Come" Chancel Choir

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Leader: Let us pray.

Pastoral Prayer

Choral Response

6:30 Monday  
++++ *Sings & chimes for decorating the sanctuary* / al  
little fish

"In This Quiet Moment"

RITUAL OF FRIENDSHIP

"Reach out and Touch"

GIVING OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS

OFFERTORY MUSIC

Chancel Choir

"While By My Sheep" - arr. Jüngst

\*DOXOLOGY

"Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow"

OFFERTORY PRAYER

THREEFOLD AMEN

GOD SPEAKS TO US

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 40:3-5

Matthew 25:1-13

MUSICAL SELECTION

Chancel Choir

"Go Tell It On The Mountain"

Dorothy Smith, Soloist

COMMUNION MEDITATION

Rev. George W. Smith

"Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord"

WE CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

HYMN OF APPROACH "Let Us Break Bread Together" # 564

\*WORDS OF INSTITUTION

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

SERVING THE BREAD AND THE CUP

THANKSGIVING AFTER THE SUPPER

\*INVITATIONAL HYMN "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" # 169

\*BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION "God Be With You" Chancel Choir

ORGAN POSTLUDE

\* Congregation standing

++++ Worshiper will be seated



TO OUR GUESTS - You are welcome to our worship service and all activities of the church. Please help us to know you by signing the record of attendance sheet as you enter the foyer. You are invited to meet with others in the Fellowship Hall for refreshments. Please come again and invite your friends and neighbors to come with you.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOR, we invite you to come to the front of the sanctuary during the invitational hymn. Elders Loma Johnson and Willie Thigpen will be at the front of the sanctuary to greet you.

HOSTING THE FELLOWSHIP HOUR TODAY will be the Deacons Board.

CHRIST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO

3025 Fir Street at 30th

San Diego, CA 92102

PHONE: 239-2346/2347

OFFICE HOURS: 9 AM to 2 PM

MINISTER:  
ASSISTANT TO THE MINISTER  
FOR COMMUNITY AFFAIRS:  
PARISH ASSOCIATE:  
CHANCEL CHOIR DIRECTOR:  
YOUTH CHOIR DIRECTOR:  
YOUTH CHOIR PIANIST:  
ORGANIST:  
CHURCH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT:  
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Rev. George W. Smith  
Mr. Donald Gullans  
Rev. Burton S. Smith  
Mrs. Dolores E. Stevens  
Mrs. Teena Cross  
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