Date: November 29, 2026 (Advent 1)

1. Texts: Isaiah 64:1-9; Ps. 80:1-7, 16-18; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: preparation for the Second Coming.
4. Aim: educate.
5. Proposition: "It will go better for us, if we prepare for the Second Coming of Christ."

PREPARE YE OUR WAY

There is an energetic but tedious song in the rock opera "Godspell" that actually fits in well with the theme of Advent. It's called "Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord", and that's actually its one lyric, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," accompanied by a driving rock percussion section. That's really what Advent is about: preparing the way for the Lord to come a second time.

But there's a better way to think about this season and its importance. Rather than "prepare ye the way of the Lord", we really should focus on preparing the way of the Lord into our hearts and lives. It's not so much "prepare ye the way of the Lord." It's much more "prepare our way to the Lord."

That's really what the collect for today is praying about.

> Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to us in great humility, that on the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Let's start with grace, since it comes first in the collect.

Grace is the favour, help, support and power that God shares with his people. We cannot earn it. We don't deserve it. He gives it to us as a gift freely given. It helps if we ask for it, but God gives us his own help, support and power to deal with whatever we confront.

Today prayed for the grace to set aside our own works of darkness, so that we may be protected by the power and identity of Christ. This is important. We're not praying to cast away the sins of the world. We're dealing with our own barriers to love, justice and harmony with God. "Almighty God, give us the grace to cast away ***OUR*** works of darkness…" We need his help, support, strength and power to be rid of our barriers to Christ.

As we push off those barriers, we take on the "armour of light", that is, the protective coating of God's truth, justice and love. Another way of thinking about this, is that we replace the barriers in our lives with the image and identity of Christ himself. We cast off the injustice and unrighteousness of our own choices to be filled and guided by the truth of Jesus as he demonstrated in his earthly existence. This shelters us from the impact of our barriers to God.

This process will help prepare us to receive Christ at his Second Coming. Of course, we all know that Advent is not about preparing for Christmas, as tempting as that interpretation might be. Advent is about preparing ourselves to receive the resurrected Christ at his second coming. In Advent, we prepare our souls and spirits to accept the Christ as he reveals himself in all his eternal glory and power.

The tricky thing about this, is that we don't know ***when*** that Second Coming will be. There's no sense is trying to calculate this or figure it out. For two thousand years Christians have been trying to guess their way to salvation. It hasn't worked yet and is not likely to work in the future.

So, we just have to live in a state of readiness for the return of the Christ. We have to constantly cast away those works of darkness and put on that armour of light. Our state of readiness must include setting aside our barriers to the identity and truth of God. We must prepare ourselves for salvation by conforming our lives to the life of Christ. Simple, right?

If only our willfulness and self-centredness didn't constantly get in the way. While it is true that we have been saved from the eternal consequences of sin, that

salvation doesn't actually stop us from sinning. We still have the freedom to choose sin and our self-centredness means that we often do choose sin.

That's why we have to beg for God's grace. Left on our own, we will usually gravitate towards our own self-satisfaction. We need God's strength, power, help and support to reach beyond our self-centredness.

Of course, this will require some level of honesty as we pray for grace. You see, prayer works better as it becomes more directed and focussed. We don't pray for universal grace. We pray for grace in specific needs. "Lord, give me the courage to turn outwards in support of this person I find difficult to love." "God, I need patience with myself in this situation." "Lord, help me to let go of my material blessings so that I may give to others generously." You see? Specific graces for you in your circumstances. But you have to be able to recognize your own barriers, so that you can pray for the grace you need to rise above.

It is best if we develop a spiritual habit of such honest reflection and prayer. Remember, we are preparing for salvation and for the return of the Christ. This is a long-term program we are developing. As we made a habit of our self-centred preoccupations, we make a habit of asking for the grace to rise above them. Do not expect a miraculous overnight transformation. In issues of the Christian faith, it is "slow and steady wins the race".

That's how we will rewrite the "Godspell" lyrics: "Prepare ye your way to the Lord." We pray for the graces we need to overcome the barriers to God that we have built. We surrender our self-centredness so that the self-sacrificing love of God may flourish. Doing such day by day will make us ready to celebrate with joy the return of our King.

AMEN.