

November 27, 2016  
First Sunday in Advent

“Jealous of the Gift”

Isaiah 2:1-5

I once knew a guy who kind of annoyed me in a number of ways. One of the ways he annoyed me was that out of the blue he would see something of mine—my electric drill, my New York sweatshirt, my single-cup coffee maker, even my 1996 Jeep Grand Cherokee Ltd.; it didn't matter—he'd say, “That's nice. I sure could use that. Can I have it?” And he was serious.

I mention this because of my reaction. The stuff I have I pretty much take for granted, but as soon as somebody else wants what's mine, suddenly it seems a lot more valuable. Right? When somebody else might get what's mine, it becomes precious. Suddenly I'm jealous for it.

I bring this up because the prophet Isaiah has this awesome Word of God; this vision of the future that he proclaims to the Jews in Judah: *“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”*

And you need to understand that when he says “and all the nations shall flow to it”, that means the non-Jews; the Gentiles. I think that turned some heads in Isaiah's day. The Jews thought they were God's chosen people destined to receive God's blessings. And I think Isaiah's prophecy would make some of them think, “Wait. That's mine!” I think this is why Isaiah then says, *“O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”* He is saying be jealous of what you have.

You see, when Isaiah spoke this Word of God, Judah was in the midst of once again failing to trust in God. I think Isaiah was kind of trying to get Israel to be jealous of Yahweh as their God—to use this promise of God to the Gentiles to spur the Jews to greater faith. Unfortunately, it didn't work. Isaiah would also prophecy Judah's exile into Babylon as punishment for their unfaithfulness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we stand in the latter days Isaiah was speaking of while at the same time looking forward to this prophecy's fulfillment. The Law has gone out from Zion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. The Word of the Son of God crucified and risen there for the forgiveness of sins has gone out into the world and generations of Christians, Jew and Gentile alike, have ceased their warfare with God and found the peace that passes all understanding.

Yet we are still on this side of that final day of judgment, awaiting the second advent of our King of Kings. We're still in the same boat as ancient Judah, facing the temptation to trust in the world instead of the one true God, to chase after idols of wealth or power or happiness or whatever. We face the temptation to take God's promise fulfilled in Christ for granted and not esteem it as our highest good.

So on this first Sunday in Advent as we begin another church year I would like to challenge you to be honest with yourself. Do you consider yourself a pretty solid Christian? Do

you think you've got this whole repentance and forgiveness thing down pat and your saving faith is on pretty solid ground? You're not perfect, of course, but do you think you're generally doing okay when it comes to your walk with Christ? If you're thinking "yes" there's nothing wrong with that. But if you're feeling this way, it's quite possible you're also taking your salvation for granted.

So now think about somebody you find really offensive. It may be somebody who voted the other way in the last election...or somebody who ran for office in it—whatever. It may be a thief who stole from you. It may be a lecher or a pervert who harmed you. Just pick somebody who strikes you as just really unclean...and then imagine Jesus Christ reaching out to them with a loving smile and calling that person to the mountain of God forever...and not doing the same to you!

Does that thought upset you? Does it make you jealous of them? Does that make you think, "Hey, wait a minute! That salvation is mine"? Does it make you want to secure the promise of God for yourself? Good! O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!

*"You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."*

The time is now to be jealous of your salvation; to value it as the most precious treasure of your entire being! When you let the gift of salvation in Christ become mundane, when you take it for granted, you are falling asleep. If we allow ourselves to do that we become like ancient Judah, possessing the promise but turning our back on it for the luster of the world. Don't do that.

I can guarantee you that a lot of really terrible, awful people are going to be received by Christ Jesus on Judgment Day. Yes they are rotten sinners, but they know it and thus acknowledge before God their desperate need of forgiveness. They beg for it, are jealous for it, and they receive it in abundance.

Jesus Christ sent God's Law, God's instructions, out from Zion and it is the Word of Law and Gospel which Jesus Himself preached very succinctly, "Repent, and believe the Good News!" He died and rose and thus established the house of the God of Jacob, His church, wherein forgiveness, life and salvation abounds and is gifted on and on in Word and Sacrament.

Be jealous for it. Be jealous not because some horrible sinner might be receiving it also. Be jealous because you are a horrible sinner yet Jesus Christ calls you to His mountain and gifts you with His perfect righteousness daily. Be jealous because the world, the flesh and the enemy Satan is indeed trying to take it away from you! Wake up and guard your faith, your life in Christ, for the precious gift that it is. Wake up and protect the treasure. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Forgiveness is yours the very day. Peace with God is yours this very day. Eternal life is yours this very day. Don't take it for granted. Treasure it and be jealous of it. The King came once for you, took your sins and gave you the gift of His kingdom. Be longing for it on the day He comes again.

Amen.