

A barber had just attended a church revival and was filled with the Spirit. He had had an Epiphany of sorts. He had come to realize that there was much in his life which was unfinished. He had much to do before he faced Jesus at the day of his death. He wanted to share his new found faith with everyone he could find. So, when his first customer showed up, the enthusiastic barber thought for a way to share his faith message. He struggled until he was almost done. As he lathered up his customer for a shave, he thought, “now’s the time”. So as he placed his razor at the customer’s neck he asked, “are you ready to meet Jesus?”

Clean-up, chair 1.

The presentation was a bit off, but the question is a valid one. Are we ready to meet Jesus?

We are now in the season of Advent. It is a time of expectation and excitement. We are getting ready for something important. Something amazing. We are getting ready for Christmas.

Now, we all get ready for this day in different ways. Our culture says we prepare by spending most of our annual disposable and not so disposable income in 30 days on decorations and gifts. It is a time of excess and ostentation as we await the coming of the economic savior of the retail business, Santa Claus.

Nothing wrong with that. I like this secular Christmas. I like to call it the secular feast of goodwill and gift giving. It’s fun. It’s nice to see people in a giving mood. I like this secular advent.

But, we in the church, celebrate Advent a little differently. Sure, we shop and decorate and await the coming of the jolly, over-girthed, home-invading elf. And, we look forward to the coming of Jesus as a baby in a manger. We await this sacrament of hope, this God-Human, born in the usual way. Starting life in poor estate. Hope born in poverty. The Abundance of God's Love born in the squalor of human scarcity.

We prepare for the coming of the baby. The one who will give us eternal life. The one who will be, for us, an example of Godly Being. The one who will offer his body and his blood that we may eat and become whole and pure and holy.

I find myself thankful, this time of year. Thankful that this baby is coming. Thankful that God's love is going to be made known in such a real and tangible way. I love baby's. They represent potential, and promise and the hope of a better tomorrow. We are waiting for a baby.

And, we wait for even more. Jesus promised us that he would return. He's real careful not to say when that will happen, but he does tell us that his return will be accompanied by judgment and with judgment comes fear and anxiety.

The Christian faith has always struggled with the idea of Christ coming again. The early church thought it was going to happen within a few days, then weeks, then months, then years of Jesus death and resurrection. They got concerned when faithful people died. Did that mean they had missed out on Christ's promise?

As the world continued to not end, this uncertainty continued to grow. We still struggle with passages like our Gospel that seem to imply an imminent universal judgment that our experience just doesn't confirm.

I think Jesus returns to us at our death. I think we see our lives through the lens of Christ's love and see where we ran with the Jesus and where we strayed away. And, we come to know exactly what the love of God in Christ is like.

And, I think that Jesus will come back to the earth to claim his place as king of all creation. I personally think this will happen when all the earth has finally come to know the love of God in Christ. In my cynicism, I think that's a long way off.

But, I will see Jesus. I will stand before him and have my life laid bare. Am I ready to meet Jesus? I'd like a little more time, please, say 40 years, but who knows. We just said good by to a truly good man, Chris Ferrer, who was all of 42. We don't know when we'll meet Jesus.

Advent is a good time to examine our lives to answer that question. And if the answer is no, it's a good time to start fixing that. Obviously, there is the important spiritual component. Are we right with God? Have we lived, as best we can, into his expectations? Do we love our neighbor as our selves? Do we treat each other with respect? Do we serve our brothers and sisters as Christ served us?

There's the temporal component as well, but I want to say that I believe they really can't be separated. How we prepare our earthly affairs reflects directly on how ready we are spiritually for our death.

Every Advent, I remind you that now is the time to prepare yourself for your death and the issues that arise at the end of life. Recent deaths in my life have made this ever so much more important to me. There are two documents I strongly advise you to have. One is the durable power of attorney for health care which names to person you want to make medical and

end of life decisions for you when you can't. The other is an advanced directive also called a living will. This spells out what you want in terms of medical care as your death becomes more immanent. Please give this gift to your family. There is nothing worse than watching a family fight over what Grandma may have wanted or not wanted after a debilitating stroke.

I also recommend that you write down your funeral wishes. Cremation or full body burial. Viewing or no. All those things help a grieving family arrive at consensus and peace.

And of course, make sure your life and work continues after you're gone. Provide for the well being of your family. Have a will. And, if possible, remember the church so that the good work you have supported in life can continue after you're gone.

And speaking of the good work you've supported in life, Advent, at least this year, is when we at St. Hilary's prepare for the ministry and mission we will accomplish in the next year. Your vestry isn't shopping and decorating, rather pouring over budgets and requests for funding. We are trying to take the resources we know you will provide and use them in the best possible way to spread the Good News of God in Christ to a broken and hungry world.

We, as individuals, and as a community, must look at the record of our lives and see if we have used the gifts God has given us to his glory and for the building up of the Kingdom of God. It is a soul issue and not a wallet issue although the wallet is involved.

Right now, the budget committee is looking at how the church has used the money it has been given in terms of mission and ministry. We are trying to envision what the true mission and ministry of St. Hilary's can be. That vision is huge. A lot more huge than our vision of what we can hope to receive to fund that mission. That's reality.

It's also a reality that we are in a difficult time for many people. We have people in our own family that are struggling in ways they have not had to struggle before. What does God expect from us for our sisters and brothers? Where's that going to come from?

I think God wants St. Hilary's to be a safe place for people of various theological and political stripes to gather and to worship God in Jesus Christ.

I think God wants St. Hilary's to be a place where our children, youth and young adults can come together in Christian fellowship and grow together in love and service to the Lord.

I think God wants St. Hilary's to be a beacon of hope to those who are lost, hungry, homeless and scared, both physically and spiritually.

I think God wants St. Hilary's to be a place where people come to learn about Jesus and then are empowered to go out into the world and tell others about Jesus.

I think when I meet Jesus, he's going to ask if I've helped His mission and ministry. I think he's going to ask if I helped the poor and needy. If I have told people about the love of God in Christ. If I have been faithful. And then we're going to watch a video of when I did good and when I did bad.

As I prepare for my meeting with Jesus, I want to be able to say that I have helped to make ministry happen, to help further the Kingdom of God. This is a big world. There are a lot of people who need help, and there are even more that need to know the Love of God in Christ and the hope for eternal life born in that little baby.

There are a lot of people that need what Advent prepares for – hope, promise, eternity. We, as heirs to that kingdom, are key players in its spread. It's right up there with caring for our family and loving God. Our support of the mission and ministry of the Church is one part of the tapestry of our lives that will unrolled on our own judgment day.

So, the question is, are you ready to meet Jesus?