

Isaiah 64:1-9  
1 Corinthians 1:3-9  
Mark 13:24-37

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Advent 1 B  
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"On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the Scout Law."

No ... it's not Scout Sunday. Although, those who keep watch and are in charge of safekeeping are often the advance scouts in charge of assessing the possibilities for future projects and prospects. They are to keep alert, to be vigilant, and to remember their duties. I am reminded this Sunday of the Boy Scout pledge of my youth ... and other pledges I have made ... be it in my ordination back in '83, my marriage in 1988, my installation here at All Saints in 1992. There likely have been times I've been inattentive ... asleep at the wheel ... failing to fully live out my good intentions. Let's explore the parameters of making pledges or vows.

Each time I've stepped up to the plate in making new commitments, I've had hopes and dreams, as have others in my family and community. I'm not sure any of us can claim success in fulfilling them all. On occasion, we've been blessed to surpass these hopes which bring delight to everyone. We don't mind burning the midnight oil or walking the extra mile when there is great fruit. Human nature, however, doesn't seem to allow for a perfect track record. We mess up, we get distracted, and we get tired and discouraged. It's important to hang on those shining moments in our memories, when grace abounded, and we felt fulfillment. Because ... after a while, it seems like people start focusing on whatever doesn't meet their expectations, and whoever has disappointed them. Instead of acknowledging their proverbial glass as being at least half-filled with blessings, they become disgruntled and disillusioned about the half-empty portion. Even more difficult to contend with in people's attitudes is when we fall into "all or nothing" thinking ... when we can't recognize anything good because we keep stewing about whatever falls short of perfection. Scripture reminds us we all fall short of the glory of God.

Some people become "gun shy" in making commitments because they've learned the hard way how challenging it is to fulfill our own good intentions, and even worse, how mad other people get when they feel we've let them down. Yet, this is another way to get trapped into "all or nothing" thinking. We won't even try because of our fear of failure. Cynicism doesn't inspire many people. Perhaps complaining gets a response on occasion, and it seems to be true how the squeaky wheel gets the grease. Yet there can be diminishing returns with negativity, because after a while, people develop deaf ears to constant complainers, writing them off.

Each of us needs to be vigilant about what we say and what we do. It makes a difference in our stewardship when we consider what ingredients we add to the potluck soup of daily life. Are we nourishing ... complementary ... sweet ... savory .. tart ...

substantial ... delightful ... refreshing? Might we be flavorless ... mushy ... sour ... crusty ... filled with empty calories? Are we afraid to give our best ... because we are afraid of rejection, or such gifts might diminish who we are and what we have? None of us like to disappoint others, and we don't want to disappoint God.

Every one of us are called to be good stewards and be ambassadors for Christ ... to do our best in life's changing seasons with the responsibilities and privileges of our fellowship with God's children and as brothers and sisters in Christ. In letting our light of faith shine to advance the Kingdom of God and prepare the way of the Lord, we need to focus on the possibilities, no matter what obstacles we encounter. We need to remember Isaiah's words in chapter 64, how God is the potter as our Creator, and we are the clay of His handiwork. None of us are junk. 1 Corinthians 1 declares we are strengthened and enriched in many ways, so we will not be found lacking in spiritual gifts as we wait for the Kingdom of Jesus to be revealed.

Some of us have seen many seasons come and go ... the new leaves which appear on spring branches, and the avalanche of leaves on our yards in autumn. Martin Luther said: "Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf of spring-time." Our Gospel lesson from Mark 13 today reminds us to pay attention to such things in nature, and the signs from Heaven. God is faithful ... and desires us to be faithful as His good stewards. As seasons change, are we distracted, discouraged, perhaps asleep at the wheel? Today's scripture has both sweet reminders and zesty warnings about keeping awake and attentive, preparing the way for Emmanuel, and demonstrating compassion to the less than perfect people in our lives. It's good news, considering the ways we each fall short of perfection. We are still perfectly loved, forgiven to start fresh. We are to either renew our best intentions or to make new commitments of love, hope and faith. There will be times of suffering, times of darkness and failure. We not only can learn from our mistakes; we are reminded how God in Heaven continues to send light into darkness. God will use our hands and voices to reveal how His Word becomes flesh, and how good things shall indeed come to those who wait on the Lord in the ways we serve.

I invite you to renew your own pledges of love and faith this Advent season. Consider these words: On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country, my community and my family ... and to obey God's Word with a spirit of hope and joy ... in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.