

The superintendent of a large Christian school was concerned about the disarray he found in so many of the classrooms he visited. Papers were often strewn on the floor, and the students' desks were surrounded by clutter. Feeling strongly that learning could not take place in such an untidy environment, he decided to take action.

He chose one classroom for an experiment, introduced himself to the students and with a smile made this proposition:

"Your teacher, principal and I provide a well-equipped classroom for you to enjoy but we need your help in keeping your desks and the classroom orderly. Many of you have crumpled papers inside your desks with books left open and the pages bent. Often there are pencils on the floor under your desks along with other debris. "I would like each of you to clean out your desk today and begin this school year resolving to keep it clean. One day I will return and inspect your desks and the person with the neatest desk will be given this \$100 bill. I won't tell you which day it will be. It will be a surprise. Not even your teacher or the principal will know the day."

The children squealed with excitement and began immediately pulling things from their desks, filling the trash baskets with crumpled papers, stacking their books neatly inside their desks, and neatly lining up their pencils and pens. Every morning for the first week, every student checked his or her desk to make sure it was in perfect condition, confident that today would be the day the superintendent returned.

The next week, a few boys grew weary of the exercise and returned to their former habits.

By the third week, several students remarked, "I doubt if he'll come back at all. He just said that to make us keep our desks clean." After two months, no one in the classrooms bothered to inspect their desks and in fact, forgot the superintendent's promise.

Except for one girl. Dutifully, she inspected her desk every morning and several times a day, making sure things were in proper order. For months, she was teased by the other students. "He's not coming back! Why do you keep looking for him? You look stupid believing that promise, anyway."

Still, she remained quiet, kept her desk in perfect condition and waited.

Near the end of the school year, there was a knock on the door and the superintendent entered. Quickly, the students flung open their desks and began frantically to clean them. But the superintendent held up his hand for them to stop. All the students were asked to stand beside their desk at attention while the superintendent inspected each desk.

One after another, he rejected them for being unkempt. One boy tried giving excuses but to no avail. Another blamed the teacher for not reminding them. Still another blamed the superintendent for making them wait so long. Finally, the superintendent arrived at the desk of the little girl who confidently displayed her well-kept desk while beaming at the superintendent.

After inspecting her desk, he took her by the hand to the front of the classroom and awarded her the \$100 bill. "Boys and girls," he said kindly, "this girl never stopped believing I would return so she kept her desk in perfect order. She didn't need to worry about what day or even what time of day I would arrive because she was always ready. ALWAYS!!"

READY—THAT IS THE KEY WORD FOR OUR GOSPEL READING THIS MORNING. BE READY!!

We have entered a new church year again as we are in the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is a time to look ahead to

the coming of Jesus as a babe in the manger. It is also a time for looking ahead for the second coming of Christ. Our gospel lesson says very plainly ***"Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect."***

SO, HOW DO WE GET READY?

We are ready for his second coming by being like that little girl in our story, daily preparation. We are to keep our desks clean or

IN OTHER WORDS—**"WE ARE TO REPENT DAILY!"**

I want to tell you something about my life which will lead us to think about being ready.

In the summer, I enjoy working in the garden. When I get all hot and sweaty from pulling weeds and hoeing the garden. The work feels good. But it also feels good to get cleaned up afterwards.

Nothing makes me feel better than to come in after a long day of hard work, in the garden then peeling off those dirty clothes, take a refreshing shower, and then put on some clean clothing.

How absurd it would be to put on those same old dirty clothes again!

And that is what Jesus is talking about for the season of Advent. We are to clean up our lives, to take off the dirty clothes and put on the new ones of GRACE.

Advent is a time of preparation and the one preparation we can do is REPENT OF OUR SINS.

Take off the dirty old self and put on the clean new self. Luther talks about this as he tells us to drown our old self daily in the waters of our Baptism and then to rise up again as a new, forgiven person living in the grace of God.

We are to be ready for the coming of Christ through our act of repentance. We acknowledge before God that we are in need of His grace through Christ, then we are symbolically drown in the waters of Baptism and raised up to a new life.

WE ARE TO BE READY BY DAILY REPENTANCE.

Repentance is the act of turning away from our sins to live a new life in Christ. And so if the second coming does come, God will see us as in our new selves, cleansed by the blood of Christ.

GOD WILL RECOGNIZE US BECAUSE HE MADE US CLEAN THROUGH JESUS' SACRIFICE.

It is like the little girl in the following:

Ian Macpherson tells a story about a little girl who was on a train to London shortly after the Second World War. She had been evacuated from the city during the air raids and had not seen her mother for a long time. She was excited about meeting her mother on arrival at the station. A fellow-passenger teased her by saying. ***"What if she does not recognize you? It is so long since she saw you and she may have forgotten what you look like."***

At first the child was shocked by the idea that her mother would not recognize her. But soon she was all smiles again as she announced, ***"It will be all right. Mummy made the dress I am wearing. If she does not know me by myself, she'll know me by my frock."*** **God will know us by the white clothes of repentance we wear when we repent.**

Repentance does not just happen once in our lives... it is a daily activity we must do to be ready for his SECOND COMING. Daily, like that girl in our first story, we must clean our desks, so to speak. We must clean our selves daily, so **we are ready for the second coming of Christ.**

BUT WE MUST REALIZE THAT DAILY PREPARATION—ALSO LEADS TO “CHANGE” IN OUR LIVES. Daily WE must repent because we do not know the time or place of his second coming.

YES, Daily I must repent because daily I can sin. Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that I do not have to repent because I am good even for God. We are never good enough for God. We are sinful people who need the daily washing away of our sins.

C.S. Lewis says: *“A Christian is not one who never goes wrong, but one who is enabled to repent and begin over again after each stumble—because of the inner working of Christ.”*

Because of Christ I can repent and begin over again. *And this can happens daily if we are honest with ourselves that we are sinful creatures who needs to repent of our sins.*

How many of us are like Lucy in the following peanuts cartoon, we want to change but cannot help ourselves.

Several years ago the Peanuts comic strip had Lucy and Charlie Brown practicing football. Lucy would hold the ball for Charlie’s placekicking and then Charlie would kick the ball. But every time Lucy had ever held the ball for Charlie, he would approach the ball and kick with all his might. At the precise moment of the point of no return, Lucy would pick up the ball and Charlie would kick and his momentum unchecked by the ball, which was not there to kick, would cause him to fall flat on his back.

This strip opened with Lucy holding the ball, but Charlie Brown would not kick the ball. Lucy begged him to kick the ball. But Charlie Brown said, *“Every time I try to kick the ball you remove it and I fall on my back.”* They went back and forth for the longest time and finally Lucy broke down in tears and admitted, “Charlie Brown I have been so terrible to you over the years, picking up the football like I have. I have played so many cruel tricks on you, but I have seen the error of my ways! I’ve seen the hurt look in your eyes when I’ve deceived you. I’ve been wrong, so wrong. *Won’t you give a poor penitent girl another chance?”*

Charlie Brown was moved by her display of grief and responded to her, *“Of course, I’ll give you another chance.”* He stepped back as she held the ball, and he ran. At the last moment, Lucy picked up the ball and Charlie Brown fell flat on his back. Lucy’s last words were, *“Recognizing your faults and actually changing your ways are two different things, Charlie Brown!”*

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE CHANGES FOR TODAY?? Lucy saw her fault but was unwilling to change her ways. What about you? **Are you ready to BOTH “REPENT” and “CHANGE YOUR WAYS”?** *Are you ready to confess your faults to Christ and allow him to clean you so that you are prepared for his second coming?*

Jesus says, **“therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”**
**DON’T MISS YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE—CHANGE THAT WILL ALLOW YOU TO
RECOGNIZE YOUR LORD AND BE READY FOR HIM. REMEMBE HE COULD RETURN TODAY!!**
Amen