

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Second Sunday in Advent
December 7, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Have hope in the imminent arrival of your Judge!

Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope. ⁵ And may God, the source of patient endurance and encouragement, grant that you agree with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one mind, in one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷ For this reason, accept one another as Christ also accepted you to the glory of God. ⁸ For I am saying that Christ became a servant of those who are circumcised for the sake of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs. ⁹ He also did this so that the Gentiles would glorify God for his mercy, as it is written:

For this reason I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and I will sing to your name.

¹⁰ And again it says:

Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.

¹¹ And again:

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples give him praise.

¹² And again Isaiah says:

There will be a Root of Jesse,
and he is the one who will rise up to rule the Gentiles;
on him the Gentiles will place their hope.

¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

—Romans 15:4-13 EHV

"All rise!" the bailiff says as the judge enters the courtroom. I have served on two juries in my lifetime. And for some reason, every time the bailiff said those words, I got this uneasy feeling. I wasn't even on trial. But there's something uneasy about a judge coming into the courtroom. It just caused me to be a little unsettled. Maybe it was the respect I had for the judge. Maybe it was the black judicial robe he wore that signified authority and the serious nature of the proceedings. Maybe it was the elevated judge's bench. I don't know. But for some reason, whenever the bailiff said, "All rise!" I just felt uneasy. The judge was coming.

During the Sundays in Advent, we are focusing on the imminent arrival of Jesus. Last week we looked at the imminent arrival of Jesus as our King, and today we see the imminent arrival of Jesus as our Judge. And I think it's good for us to examine our hearts and minds with this. Are you looking forward to standing before Jesus as your Judge, or do you get that uneasy, unsettled feeling when you think about it?

We profess the truth that Jesus is coming back as the Judge of every single person every time we confess the Apostles' Creed. **"[Jesus] ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead."**

That creed, that statement of belief, is, of course, based on the teachings of the apostles and of Jesus himself. When Peter talks about the unbelievers who have plunged themselves into sin, he writes to the believers, **"They are surprised that you do not plunge into the same overflowing river of filth with them, and they slander you. They will have to give an account to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead"** (1 Peter 4:4,5 EHV). The Judge is coming.

Or when Paul is writing his last letter to Timothy before he dies, he encourages Pastor Timothy, **"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word"** (2 Timothy 1:1,2 EHV). The Judge is coming.

Jesus, the Judge, is coming. Are you excited about that? Or are you a little uneasy about it? God wants us as his people to long for and look forward to the time when we will stand before Judge Jesus. And I want to remind you today of how you can **have hope in the imminent arrival of the Judge.**

It all starts with the voice of one crying out. But instead of a bailiff crying out, "All rise," God's announcers have a different message so that you and I are ready for his imminent arrival. Repent! **"Repent because the kingdom of heaven is near! Prepare the way of the Lord! Make his paths straight!"** Repent!

That's how God makes us ready for the arrival of the Judge. It's through repentance. Now, when God talks about repentance, he describes a new mindset. It's a change. It's like heading one way and having a 180 degree turn so you head the other way.

But repentance isn't created in us by our own efforts. This is God's work in our lives. God speaks to us through his law, and he convicts us of our sins. He leads us to have sorrow over our sins. Not the kind of sorrow where we say, "Oh, I'm sorry that I got caught" or "I'm sorry that I caused so much trouble." Not a worldly sorrow. No. This is a godly sorrow. We see our sins as completely offending our God. I know what I deserve. My sins are so severe that I deserve to be cast away from God's presence forever."

That's the first part of repentance, but it doesn't end there. If it did, we would be left in utter despair. No. God rushes in and gives us an announcement that is beyond our comprehension. "God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only-begotten Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." Jesus has become guilty for your sins in your place. You are forgiven.

It's a whole new mindset. You aren't bound to those sins. You aren't heading toward hell. No, Christ has set you free. You are now heading toward heaven. You are forgiven, and you are now free to live a life in full gratitude and thanksgiving to God.

So, repentance isn't just a feeling or a good work. It's God at work in our lives daily turning us from sin to God's mercy. It's acknowledging our utter need for Jesus and receiving forgiveness through the gospel. That new mindset instills in us the desire and the ability to then respond to Christ's forgiveness with fruits of repentance. These are good works done out of thanks for what he has done for us.

And that's how God prepares us for the imminent arrival of our Judge. Instead of hearing "All rise," we hear and heed the words, **"Repent because the kingdom of heaven is near."**

Well, the only way you and I can know what sin is and can know about a Savior from sin is by looking to God's revealed, inspired, and inerrant Word. That's why Paul encouraged Timothy to **"Preach the word."** That's why Paul writes to the Christians living in Rome in our text for today: **"Indeed, whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that, through patient endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we would have hope."** God wants you to **have hope in the imminent arrival of the Judge.**

Now, when Scripture talks about hope, it's not like how you and I often use the word. It's not like a wishful thought. You know where we say things like "I hope it rains tomorrow" or "I hope the Cardinals beat the Rams today." That kind of hope doesn't see a real possibility. It's more like a pipe dream.

No. When Scripture talks about hope, think about the passage from Hebrews 11:1, **"Faith is being sure about what we hope for, being convinced about things we do not see."** It's a certainty. It's a reality. The reason it is a "hope" is because we haven't experienced it yet. We can't see it with our eyes. Paul wanted that hope for the Christians living in Rome, and he wants it for us.

When Paul writes this letter to the Christians living in Rome, he's writing to both Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity. These are Jews and Gentiles who have come to faith in Jesus as the Savior. God unites these two groups of people into one family. It doesn't matter what your ethnicity, language, or nation is. God brings us into the same family through faith in Jesus. And it has always been God's plan for the people of this world to come to faith in Jesus. He is the only way to eternal life. He is the only way to heaven.

Oh, certainly, God used the Jewish people to bring Jesus into this world. He promised that the Savior would come from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised to build his family through the root of Jesse, in other words, his son David. But God always intended that his message would go out into all the world. Jesus is the Savior of all.

Paul goes on in Romans 15, quoting from the Old Testament Scriptures, to teach those truths. But then he ends this section by writing, **"Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."** There it is again: hope! God wants us to be united as one in the hope, the certainty, of the imminent arrival of the Judge. He wants us together to have the same joy and peace.

Now, there are a couple of things I want you to think about here. First of all, I want you to ponder the truth that God has given us each other so that we can encourage each other and patiently endure with each other until we stand before Jesus as Judge. Here's what I mean.

If you know that I have sinned, please come and talk to me about it. As my brother or sister in Christ, please show me my sin so that you can bring me Christ's forgiveness. It's important for us to do this with each other. Let's tear down any walls or barriers and have an openness with each other where we can lovingly call each other to "Repent!"

I think we could see this very clearly in our family situations. My sinful nature sometimes gets the best of me. And I can arrogantly think that I am always right. I give thanks to God for my wife who gently leads me to confess my sin. "I am sorry." And I doubly give thanks to God for my wife who announces, "I forgive you, and even more importantly, Jesus forgives you." I need that. And so do you!

We need people like that in our lives. We need each other in our lives so that we are ready for the imminent arrival of the Judge.

But this also gives us an opportunity to let the world around us know what is important for getting ready for his arrival. Here's what I mean. When I was a child, I had a neighborhood friend whose parents were always yelling. I mean it was bad. I never wanted to go over to his house because it just was chaotic disharmony in that house. Everybody in the household was at odds with each other. I didn't want to be there.

So, think about that when it comes to our church. Instead of being at odds with each other, how can we strive for unity, joy, and peace? I mean, why would anyone want to come to our house, our church, if we always had chaotic disharmony? Why would anyone want to be here if we could never get along?

So, this is important not only for us to have hope in the imminent arrival of the Judge. It's also important so that other people want to be here so that they too can be ready for his arrival. Does that make sense?

Paul ends this section of his letter by saying, **"Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."**

Here is where we need peace. Oh, certainly, we need peace with God, as we talked about last week. But we also need peace with each other. The people of our congregation need to be at peace with each other so that we and others can **"overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."**

So, imagine being on trial in a courtroom. All the evidence is clearly laid out against you. This will be an easy verdict for the judge to make. But then you realize that the Judge is actually Jesus. He came to this earth on that first Christmas to serve us. He became a servant of all people. He became your servant. And as the perfect Son of God, he offered his righteous life in exchange for your sinful life. And you know this. You know that you have been acquitted by Jesus your Savior. This is your confidence. This is your hope.

So, when the bailiff announces, "All rise," you do so with the utmost joy and confidence. You stand with your head held high because you know what the verdict will be. "Not guilty! The kingdom of heaven is here." My friends, **have hope in the imminent arrival of the Judge.** Amen.