

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT 2018

SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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THE COLLECT



It's the Sunday Next before Advent...the culmination of the Season of Trinity...and the Church's New Year's Eve. Secular New Year's Eve celebrations often include singing *Auld Lang Syne*...Robert Burns' famous 1788 poem put to music. *Auld Lang Syne* literally means...*for old times sake*.

Along with spirited and energized renditions of *Auld Lang Syne* come those personal resolutions to do better in the coming year...be kinder toward others...hope for a brighter and peaceful future for humanity. The challenge for most of us is in keeping those resolutions.

The Sunday Next before Advent has a special name among Anglicans..."Stir up Sunday"...a name it gets from the beginning of the Collect..."*Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people*"...in plain non-Prayer Book language..."*God...please energize our wills.*"

The Collect is one of the oldest in the *Book of Common Prayer*...dating to the 10th Century. Father Massey Shepherd...in the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*...writes the opening words to the Collect..."Stir up" (*excita* in Latin)...refers to God's power and man's will...and that the fruit of God's work and the fruit of our good works are not exactly the same...although they are intimately connected.

Next Sunday...Advent Sunday...is the Church's New Year's Day. It's time for us to make some New Year's Eve resolutions of the spiritual kind...asking God to "stir up"...*"energize"* our wills to be more like his will...to do what is right and pleasing to him. We ask God to bless the work we do...making our work good and productive.

About 700 years before the birth of Jesus...God's people started getting involved with pagan religious practices...doing things clearly against God's will. King Zedekiah of Judah even signed a treaty with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon...and then promptly double-crossed him. Things did not go well for Zedekiah or his people.

God sent Jeremiah the prophet to warn the people their incessant bad behavior would only bring misery on themselves. They ignored his warning. Jeremiah lived to see his prophecy come true when the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. God's will for his people was life and prosperity...they chose death and destruction.

Jeremiah's prophecy wasn't all doom and gloom. He told the people things were going to get better. God was going to send a king who was a descendant of David, and his name would be "The Lord Our Salvation". Jeremiah gave the people a message of hope...God loves them and wants what's best for them.

God's love for us isn't an abstract idea or thought...it's an action. God revealed his love for the Jews by doing things for them, either directly, or through people like Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. Let's think about the people who have had a positive influence on your life. We often experience God's love through the actions of the people we come into contact with in our daily lives. Think about how we can take God's love and show it in our own lives...we can start that process by trying to figure out what God's will is for us...and then get "stirred up" to take action.

We are about to turn our attention toward the most important event in human history: the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. It is God's direct interjection of himself into human history, as a baby in a manger, at a specific time, and in a specific location. It is God's love revealed to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus the baby, Jesus the King. It is the moment God learned to walk among us so one day we might walk with him in heaven.

Let's make today's Collect our New Year's resolution...God, stir up our wills...energize our hearts, minds and souls...help us to be enthusiastic in telling others about the gift you gave us in your Son, Jesus, whose birth we will soon celebrate...and make the work we do truly pleasing to you and a reflection of just how much you love the people you created.

Let's make this New Year's resolution one we will keep!

