

Sunday Next Before Advent 2023
Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
The Collect Jeremiah 23.5-8



It's time for us to get stirred up...stirred up in the Spiritual sense.

Our 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* calls the last Sunday in the long Trinity Season, the *Sunday Next Before Advent*. The title for this day comes down to us from the late 11th Century *Sarum Missal*, which was the pattern for the first *Book of Common Prayer of 1549*.

The opening words of the Collect..."Stir up"...excita (ex-KEY-ta) in Latin...mean *excite, wake up, and stir up*. The Collect gives today its special Anglican nickname..."Stir up Sunday".

The Sunday Next Before Advent is the Church's New Year's Eve. Secular New Year's Eve celebrations often involve making a New Year's resolution. Our Spiritual New Year's Eve resolution **IS** today's Collect...

...Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *American Prayer Book Commentary*, notes the words "Stir up" in the Collect has a double reference---both the God's power and to our will. He goes on to say the fruit of divine work and the fruit of our good works are not exactly the same thing, though there is certainly an intimate connection between them.

What we are asking God to do is **stir up** our wills so they conform more to his will. Our wills often conflict with his. Our Spiritual New Year's Eve resolution is an urgent prayer God will help us get rid of the old habits that keep us from loving him and others as we should...and take on new habits...that will produce the kind of good works that are pleasing to him.

The Lesson appointed for the Epistle from the prophecy of Jeremiah is about works...good and bad. Jeremiah lived from c.650 BC to c.570 BC and prophesied in the southern Kingdom of Judah. His name means the

"weeping prophet" and certainly had a lot to cry about. He is traditionally considered the author of the OT Book of Lamentations, poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

In 597 BC, Judah was ruled by the puppet king, Zedekiah, who signed a pact with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Zedekiah ignored Jeremiah's warnings about getting involved with pagan kings. Later, Zedekiah double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, took its people into slavery, sacked Jerusalem, and killed Zedekiah's family. Father Shepherd refers to Zedekiah as the "last and sorry monarch" of Judah.

Zedekiah proved himself to be anything but righteous. His bad works produced bad results...the destruction of Jerusalem. But Jeremiah told God's people not to be discouraged and to endure their hardships with patience and courage. There was hope for a brighter future! God would send a savior...and he would be called **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. He would do what no human king could do, make things right again between God and his people. He would be a descendant of the great King David.

Jesus is the **RIGHTEOUS ONE** Jeremiah is talking about. It is his First Advent...his First Coming...we are preparing to celebrate at Christmas. We also need to remind ourselves this is also the time we are to prepare ourselves for his Second Advent...his Second Coming.

Let's not wait any longer to make our Spiritual New Year's Eve resolutions. The good news is we have help in making and keeping those resolutions. We have help in conforming our hearts, minds, and wills to God's.

It's time to get excited; it's time to wake up; it's time to get stirred up. Advent...the Church's New Year's Day...is almost here. Jesus, our King and Savior is coming soon. And with his arrival comes renewed hope.

Let's get ready to welcome him.

