

Advent 2019

Advent is a waiting. Maybe you've been waiting... all year to sing some Christmas hymns, or to get your family picture made so you can send out your Christmas card, or to get a special gift for someone, or to let someone know what you want for Christmas, or for a time to spend with others you love. Maybe you've been waiting...all year for the anticipated stress and anxiety that comes with Christmas, or the sadness that is more immediate at Christmas because of the memories of lost loved ones, or the depression you just can't seem to avoid at Christmas time. We associate Christmas with waiting, whether the waiting is for something we look forward to or something we can't wait to get through. This Advent season we want to help you focus on the coming of Jesus Christ for the renewal of your life, and the hope of your heart, as you anticipate life forevermore in his coming again to you.

We've been waiting for this Advent season, which begins December 1st, to lead you to God in Christ. The Advent season is an opportunity to focus on the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. He came in the flesh, and he will come in again in glory. It is the privilege of the church to celebrate the Advent season in our worship, life, and ministry together around the coming of Jesus Christ.

Our service of worship in the morning will be centered around the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. In the narratives of his first coming we will anticipate his coming again by his Spirit to renew us each week, as we look in hope to his promised second coming where we will be finally renewed in his presence. A helpful daily advent devotional on Luke 1 and 2 is *Repeat the Sounding Joy* by Christopher Ash.

Our service of worship in the evening will be centered around select Advent or Christmas hymns. We will be looking at how the Scriptures inform the hymns and how these hymns have and continue to form Christ in us. As a help to you personally or in your families I suggest reading, *Stories Behind the Best Loved Songs of Christmas*, Ace Collins and *Stories of Christmas Carols*, Ernest K. Emurian.

In addition to our regular Sunday Services we will be having a Christmas Eve Service 5:30 pm at Barnwell St.

Orthodoxy: Law and Us

New City Catechism Q.13: Can anyone keep the law perfectly?

Answer: Since the fall, no mere human has been able to keep the law of God perfectly, but consistently breaks it in thought, word, and deed.

"None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one." - Romans 3:10-12

Natural man lives his or her life in the service of sin.

A man was casually walking the oceans edge. His bare feet carelessly carried him along the surface of the sand. His eyes diverted here and there distracted by the litter of shells, the swooping gulls, the foaming breaking of a wave or it's silent retreat back into the foreboding mystery called sea. His course was not direct as he weaved along the narrowing sandy beach under the breath of a gentle breeze. A weary caution was a stranger to his stroll. Until, he heard a crash of loud thunder, and felt the wind by a penetrating swirl of loose sand. His head was raised and his senses alerted to the danger of a sudden storm. The black clouds brought a foreboding ominous presence and his pace quickened. No longer could he hear the gentle lapsing of waves as their crashing presence pushed him away in fear. He moved with an unnatural quickness toward the dunes with the hopes of a path to lead him away from the trap of an open beach. Lightning flashed and he began to run. Rain began to pelt his thin shirt and water began to drain down from his head until he was soaked through. Through the dune he

skirted barefooted picking up sand spurs every other step straining eyes eclipsed by water and terror. He found a path leading away through thick growing scrub oaks hovering over his course with a canopy of darkness. He ran as it curved along until it gave way to a green lawn decorated by a stilted house. He ran across the turf and into its cover collapsing in its shelter. He sat in the shelter from the storm brushing the sand from his feet and picking the small barbs of the sand spurs from his pierced skin. He watched and thought about how he would be more careful next time to check the radar on his phone app before his walk, how he would walk with more alertness to his surroundings, and how a simple rain jacket would have been a welcome guest in his retreat from the storm and in his sheltered haven. As he sits calculating the storm soon passes. His shelter has been quietly his own but now he decides to return down the path, through the dunes to his casual stroll by the sea.

This is the way of natural man. His life is both a casual and reckless stroll in the way of sin. Then suddenly a storm in his conscience arises. The law of God written upon his heart, the moral law thundered through a Judeo-Christian ethic echoing in his ears, or laws of his chosen culture are the thunderclap that rattles his conscience. He feels the lightening of judgment. So he seeks the shelter of doing better. He turns to self improvement and religious observance. He prays and pays homage to the gods and man. He mediates in his own temple imagining himself walking in the better ways, the ancient paths of those who have come before him, who did better. But when the storm is past he is back in his way. He cannot help it. He cannot change it.

Though God created a perfect humanity that was able to mirror his creator in righteousness and holiness, he rebelled losing his ability to glorify and honor his Creator. Natural man's whole being is permeated by this spiritual rebellion, blindness, illness, bondage and death. Man is not merely weak, or inhibited, or impaired. Man is wholly incapable, he is devoid of any power to glorify God by his thoughts, affections, words, or deeds. The result is an estranged relationship with our Creator, ourselves, others, and the world we live in. But worse, the result is that we are God's guilty enemies. Therefore, we are constantly living now and forever before his holy wrath. This is the bad and discouraging story of Everyman. But it is this news that is the backdrop for the good news.

Man can do nothing about his condition, but God can do everything for him in this condition. Natural man cannot keep God's law, but the God man Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of a perfect humanity. He came to do the will of the Father who sent him. The extent of his perfect obedience was his death on the cross for the sins of the people. Those who trust in him for their salvation are forgiven all their sins freeing them from guilt, and set free in a life of his power so that remaining sin and guilt no longer dominate our lives. This life in the Son is in the power of his death and his resurrection. Therefore as he lives so we live in his abundant and eternal life. Therefore, his life promised to us is not interrupted by our death. In this life we will continue to struggle with sin, but his resurrection for us promises us that our struggle with sin will not end in death and condemnation, but life and his everlasting presence of joy. In that life we will become fully like him, fully obeying him without any struggle with sin.

There is a life since the fall lived in the way of sin. But there is hope in Jesus Christ for all who have fallen. He can be with us in the stroll by the oceans edge and the shelter in the stormy blast.

Ministry Opportunities

Bradley Elementary - Lunch Buddies

If you are interested in building a relationship with those at Bradley Elementary School, and investing in a child's life, then being a Lunch Buddy is a good opportunity. Lunch Buddies is a mentoring program which meets twice a month on Tuesdays from 12pm-1pm. Volunteers sit with their student while they eat lunch and then break off into rooms to allow the students to read with the volunteers. The desire is to have a 1-1 ratio of students and volunteers. However, there are floaters available when volunteers miss. This program at the school is organized by volunteers from Eastminster Presbyterian Church. Therefore, there is a needed background check, both by Richland 1 and Eastminster. If you are interested please contact Jim Wilkerson and he will get you started on the paper work for the background check. If you have any questions please contact Jim.

Host an International Student in Your Home for Christmas

This year, International Friendship Ministries (IFM), have lots of internationals who have signed up to be hosted this Christmas! They don't know how many of them have spent time in an American home before, and how many have spent quality time with a Christian family, but its a great opportunity for them to have contact with Christians.

If you are interested in hosting one or more students in your home for a Christmas Dinner you can follow this link <https://www.ifmusa.org/meal-with-a-friend> These students are our neighbors who are sojourning among us. This is a great opportunity to build a relationship and introduce them to the love of Jesus Christ.