

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED **Colossians 1:16-23a****KEEPING IN TUNE WITH ADVENT . . .**

*By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

*For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.*

*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.*

Keeping in tune in a band or in a choir, keeping in tune with the way a piece is written, that's important when singing or playing, especially when the selection is being presented to others, and especially when the selection is being presented to honor someone for what he or she has done! Even though these weeks before Christmas are a time of music, I am not talking about Keeping in Tune with the music this morning. I am using that as a figure of speech to talk about your heart and your life before God. Are you in tune with what God wants this Advent Season? Are you in tune, presenting your heart and life in acceptable fashion before Christ this season? It is **His** birth and **His** arrival on earth that Christmas honors. It is **His** second arrival on earth at the End that our hearts honor with joy as well.

Why be in tune with Christ during these Advent days of preparation and waiting? Our text gives us what I would call three answers. 1) *By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.* We want to be in tune with Christ in heart and life because He created everything—even each of us. We are not just talking about celebrating for George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, but for Christ who is the creator of everything! Everything—the vast regions of space with its incomprehensible distances falteringly measured in light years. The power of the sun which warms this whole earth. Imagine building a furnace that could heat, not just the homes, but the whole state of South Dakota. You get the picture the whole world. He created **every** visible thing, and even the invisible things—the gases of the air, the microscopic molecules and atoms of physical objects, the items of the micro-biology world, even **forces** at work in nature—gravity, and life itself—that non-tangible “force” that differentiates us from rocks and oil. Then there are the spirit-world beings—beings without bodies, but beings that exist, move, think and communicate—we're talking about the holy angels as well as the angels that rebelled and turned against the Lord. All things! Jesus—with the Father and the Spirit—is Creator of all things. He exists before all things and holds all things together. If Christ had not been—if Christ were not—we would not be. If He did not continue to hold all things together and in operation, we would be done. Take away Christ, and it's Game Over. He's the one to stay in tune with.

Also 2) *And He is the head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence* A second reason we want to stay in tune with Him is that He is the **head** over all things, specifically He is the **head** of the church, His body. Christians, the believers, the ones clinging to Christ for forgiveness, eternal safety, and protection, are called *His body*. We belong to Him. We operate at His direction. He is the control center and data center for all functions of all believers as we live for Him individually and also as a group on this earth. The Invisible Church, that gathering of all believers of all time, is His body. We are His members. A human body can function without a hand, foot, leg, arm, etc., but take away the head and there's nothing. So as we are preparing for His first Advent, or His the second--we want to stay in tune with Him, our head!

Before we go on to the third reason for keeping in tune with Him during Advent, let's talk a little about Advent and Christmas itself. There are several possible ways to celebrate Christmas. A.) A season all about “me.” Time off work or school for me, presents and gifts for me, parties and treats for me, closeness with **my**

loved ones and **my** family, helping others as **my** contribution and **my** labors to improve this world and society. Such a Christmas is indeed an earthly centered festivity. No Christ here. This indeed is “x-mas.” B.) A season about God and praising God. This starts out good. We honor our Creator and Sustainer, we praise Christ for all that He’s done, we thank Him for showing and teaching us what is right and wrong, for showing us and teaching us what is love, for defeating the forces of evil in this world. “Lord, congratulations, You did it!” one could say at such a Christmas. But something is missing. It sounds religious. It does not sound self-centered like the first, Christ is included, but something is missing. We could rightly call this “x-mas” also, because there is no celebration of our precious and needed Redemption at the price of Jesus’ blood. C.) So then, the third manner of celebrating Christmas is to honor Christ, our Rescuer and Savior from sin, death, and hell! We don’t just praise Him for a job well done. **We love Him because He came to rescue and save us from our sins!**

3) And this is exactly where our text goes next, the third reason for Keeping in Tune with Advent *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.* In Advent we prepare to celebrate Christ, our safety-escape, from certain and well deserved death. He brings us resurrection and new Life! He is the beginning, the *firstborn from the dead*. No other resurrection from the dead would take place without His resurrection from the dead. He is first in origin and operation for resurrection and new life in place of death. He has reconciled us by the blood of His cross. He in whom all the fullness of heaven and earth dwell, He who is both the fullness of God and the fullness of man, came to *reconcile* the Father to us and us to the Father. There is a huge divide between God and us, because we are woeful and disobedient sinners. Example: Were you nice to your brothers and sisters this morning? If you were, was it because you **had** to be or you **wanted** to be? Were you nice to your wife or husband yesterday, even if frustrated? If so, was it because you **had** to be or you **wanted** to be? God expects actions of love, but we often respond only with actions done because we **have to**. Another mark against us. The Father is not pleased. Jesus has come to reconcile—to bring peace between—to balance the books—between the Father and us. It’s not a compromise—as if we give a little, and God gives a little. Jesus came to reconcile us through the blood of His cross. He met God’s demands to the “T” with His life and death, His suffering and blood. He rose in victory, and we are granted—granted!—forgiveness and life.

Now we are no longer alienated from the Father! We are no longer outsiders and outcasts, different and unwelcome, because of the sin and rebellion in our hearts and minds present already at birth. *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.* In Jesus we are holy and blameless, heirs of heaven. Why do you want to be in tune with Advent? To celebrate **Christmas**. Advent is a time to make preparations for a genuine **Christmas** celebration. Not just physical preparations for the physical things that have come to be part of the physical Christmas, but spiritual preparations. Note the color of the paraments today? Purple. When else do we use purple? During Lent. Lent and Advent are both seasons of repentance. “Lord, (sigh) I have done wrong again, more than I know. I need Your mercy and forgiveness, Your love and new life. Forgive me for Jesus’ sake.” Such an approach is in tune with Christ. Such an approach leads to real joy at Christmas. *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight!* This is not just an x-mas, but a **Christmas**! And if you are aware that Greek name for Christ actually starts with the Greek letter “chi,” which looks like an X to us, and if you wish to use that X as an honorable abbreviation for “Christ” in Christmas, maybe use the “chi” and also the second letter of His name in Greek, the “rho,” which looks like an English “p.” “Chi-rho,” or “Xp” so as to distinguish Xp-mas from x-mas.

You are in tune with Advent and Christmas-- as our text says-- *if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard.* Hold on to the sure and certain hope of the “Gospel.” In Jesus you have this “Good News” of release from the prison in which your own sins have landed you. You have been reconciled to God through His blood. You are set free and forgiven! This Advent and Christmas strive to center on spiritual things, staying in tune with the Savior. I know, traditions keep increasing and piling up. You can let some go, you know. Really how much money do you have to spend on one another to rejoice in Christ’s reconciliation? How grand of a physical feast do you really have to have to rejoice in Christ’s forgiveness won for you? How much time away from worship do you really need to spend in order to celebrate the Arrival of your Savior? NONE. Stay in tune with Christ during Advent. Do not celebrate “x-mas,” but “Xp-mas.”

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach ---