Very soon someone is bound to ask, “Are you ready for Christmas?” I don’t know about you but I never feel ready for Christmas, even on Dec. 24th. It always seems that there’s something more to do. Some people are so well-organized that they’re ready for Christmas now, presents bought, parties planned, decorations up, cards sent. If you are ready for Christmas now, I don’t want to hear it. Today you are not my friend!

But the most important spiritual question is not “are you ready for Christmas?” The most important question is “Are you ready for Jesus’ second coming?” Christmas celebrates a past event, a most important one; the birth of our Saviour. But Christ’s second coming is a very important event too, since it still lies ahead of us, in the future. And Christ’s second coming is also a present event. It happens now. In our end times, Christ comes to us with a new beginning.

In Luke 21: 25-36, Jesus speaks of his second coming. This is what will happen when this world is judged and brought to an end by God. “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among the nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” Jesus says, “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near... when you see these things taking place know that the Kingdom of God is near.” Jesus will ride over the chaos of the end times and come with a new beginning for God’s creation.

Some people have trouble with God’s judgement. They ask, “How can the God of love bring such judgement on the earth?” Actually, I would say that God’s judgement is an expression of his love. Because God is love God will judge and overturn all that is unloving. God is good and God is holy and he will put an end to all that is not good and holy. God’s judgement is his way of making the crooked roads straight and the rough places plain. I was reading recently about how unscrupulous business people in New York City are buying up houses of lower income people and basically leaving them with nothing. Legal loopholes allow them to get away with it. God will not let that kind of injustice go on forever. In Afghanistan a nineteen year old girl in an arranged marriage was recently stoned to death for alleged adultery. Adultery is not God’s will but neither is putting a young woman or anyone else to death by stoning. God will not allow such brutality to stand. All that is not in line with the will and character of our loving and holy God will be judged and put away at the last. It will have no place in God’s new creation.
The day of judgement will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth, says Jesus. There will be signs in the stars and distress among the nations. The sea will roar. People will faint in fear and foreboding. The powers of heaven will be shaken. This will happen as the old world passes away and the new world is ushered in. Of course, judgment is not just in the future. It’s happening now, too. Is the roaring of the seas and the greater intensity of storms a judgement on our life-style? Perhaps, and I’m just as guilty and resistant to change as anyone. God’s judgement is not just for end times. It is happening now. And end times are not just at the end. We experience end times now. Adam and Eve knew end times. Their innocence and close walk with God came to an end because of their disobedience. So too did their time in the Garden. And there was no going back.

We have experienced endings in our own lives. Good times inevitably come to an end. Bad times do, too. Knowing that bad times end gives us courage to hang on through the darkness. “This too will pass,” we say. We know the ending of relationships. That can happen at an early age, when your best friend moves away. As we get older relationships can end for deeper reasons - unfaithfulness, misunderstanding, death. Many people have known the ending of jobs and pay-cheques. Our career comes to an end when we retire. For some people that is a welcome ending. We know the endings of hopes and dreams. I knew of one young woman who from a young age had her heart set on becoming a doctor. She worked hard and did well in her studies, and every time she applied to medical school she fell just short of getting in. She finally accepted that her dream had come to an end. Sometimes illness or disability puts an end to our dreams. Your life and mine will come to an end, too, a result of our mortal and fallen nature. No one will escape. End times are not just at the end of time. They happen now.

But here is good news. In end times, Jesus Christ comes with a new beginning. “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.’ Yes, this will happen at the final judgement. Jesus Christ crucified and risen and ascended will come again from heaven with a new beginning for God’s creation. That’s Biblical truth. Actually Christ’s first coming brought judgement. His life and words exposed the hypocrisy and greed and power-seeking of the religious and political leaders. That’s why they nailed him to an old rugged cross. But on the third day God raised him from the dead to live for evermore and crowned him as Lord of all. Jesus’ death and resurrection put an end to the old covenant and established a new covenant. Now we are forgiven and come to God not through the old sacrificial system but through faith in Christ. That’s what this table and this sacrament is all about.

Jesus Christ is not bound by time or space. When end times come upon us, so too does Jesus. He comes by the power of the Holy Spirit, riding over the clouds of confusion and distress to be with his people. In our end times, Jesus Christ comes to us with a new beginning. When our lives are overcome by sorrow and regret for things past, he brings forgiveness and a new start. After Jesus’ resurrection, Peter went back to fishing. He thought, “I denied my Lord three times. My days of following Jesus are ended. He’s rejected me for sure.” But the Risen Lord came to Peter on the shores of Galilee and asked him three times if he loved him. Three times Peter said, “Yes Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus gave Peter a new beginning and made him into a brave and faithful apostle even unto death.
If only the elders of Afghanistan had thought of Jesus before they stoned to death that 19 year woman. Do you remember what happened when men brought a woman to Jesus who had committed adultery? They wanted to stone her to death according to the Law of Moses. But Jesus said, “Whoever is without sin may cast the first stone.” They all walked away as Jesus lifted her up and said to her, “Neither do I condemn you. Go now and sin no more.” Jesus gave her a new beginning.

And even in the ending we call death Christ comes and raises his people up to eternal life in the Father’s house. By God’s grace and Jesus’ power the ending of our life here on earth means the beginning of new life closer to God and God’s redeemed people.

Endings so often contain the seeds of new beginnings. I remember my friend Bill. I worked with him for some years doing the same kind of insurance work. Bill was laid off when the company restructured. He was unemployed for nearly a year and often I talked to him. We sometimes met at a restaurant. Bill was smart and capable, but nothing he applied for came through. He was down and distressed and often filled with foreboding. It was hard to know what to say to him, since I was still working. I assured Bill of my prayers and support. But during that year, I had heard God’s calling. I was going to begin my studies for ministry in the fall. In the spring I received an unexpected call from a head hunter looking for a person with my experience. Well, I wasn’t interested but I certainly knew someone who was. I told Bill and he applied and got the job. It was a new beginning for him. It’s a simple story, but I saw God’s hand in it. In our end times, Christ comes to us with a new beginning. And what about that girl who couldn’t get into medical school? She is now married with children and loves her job as a medical researcher. And when the end of a relationship comes for whatever reason, we often find that another begins unexpectedly, surprisingly, as we wait patiently for the Lord.

In every ending Christ plants the seeds of a new beginning. The One who was given a new beginning when God raised him from the grave now gives us new beginnings. In our end times we can stand up and raise our heads because our redemption is drawing near. A new beginning is at hand. Don’t miss the new beginning Christ gives us every day. “New Every Morning is the Love.”

In our endings Christ comes to us with a new beginning. It happens now and it will happen at the end of time. Jesus Christ will come in a cloud with power and great glory. The old order will pass away. God’s new creation will begin. And we who trust in Christ have nothing to fear. God’s love will hold us fast through the waves of judgement and sweep us into God’s eternal Kingdom.

The question of Advent is not, “are you ready for Christmas?” The question is “Are you ready for Christ’s coming and a new beginning?” Jesus says, “Watch for my coming, watch for it. Live by the values of God’s coming Kingdom. Do God’s work. Trust and pray. Be strengthened in faith at my table. Be on guard. Don’t let your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unexpectedly.” In our end times, Jesus Christ comes to us with a new beginning. It will happen at the end of time and it happens even now. So watch with hope and expectation. Lift up your heart. Be ready.
Robert was a Canadian pilot in Afghanistan. After his 50th mission, he was surprised to be given permission to immediately fly his plane home with his crew. These military men flew across the ocean to Trenton and then had a long drive to London. Robert finally reached his house as the morning sun was rising. He saw a big banner across the garage—"Welcome Home Dad!" How did they know? He hadn’t called, and the crew hadn’t expected to leave so quickly. Robert walked into the house, and the kids, half dressed for school, screamed, “Daddy!” His wife Susan ran down the hall - -hair done, make-up on, and wearing a new yellow dress. “How did you know?” he asked. “I didn’t,” she answered through tears of joy. “But we knew you’d try to surprise us, so we were ready every day.”