

December 7, 2025

Matthew 3:1-12:

## **Are You Ready?**

- I. Have You Ever Felt Ready?
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## **Are You Ready?**

### **Matthew 3:1-12**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

A little over two weeks ago, I was going through the Starbucks drive-through to grab some breakfast and a coffee. It was just an ordinary morning. The cashier smiled, greeted me, and we ended up chatting about Thanksgiving. Before long, the conversation drifted to the question everyone seems to ask this time of year: “Are you ready for the holidays?” Without even thinking, I answered honestly, “I’m not ready.” And it was true. My Thanksgiving sermon wasn’t finished, Advent planning still loomed over me, and I had not bought a single gift. In that moment, I felt, once again, like I was behind on everything.

After exchanging the usual holiday well-wishes, I drove off and started wondering: When was the last time I actually felt ready for the holiday season? I racked my brain, thought back through the years, and then it hit me that I don’t think I ever have. Even as a kid, back when my only “responsibility” was to go to Church, wait for presents, and Christmas dinner, there was always this lingering tension, this sense of pressure and expectation that never fully went away. Maybe you’ve felt it too: the sense that no matter how much you prepare, you’re never quite ready.

#### **I. Have You Ever Felt Ready?**

The appointed theme for this Second Sunday in Advent is “Are You Ready?” This is a fitting question for the Second Sunday in Advent. After all, John the Baptist stands before us as the great forerunner, calling God’s people to prepare the way for Christ. So naturally, we expect to talk about readiness, repentance, and the coming of the Messiah. But before we move into John’s powerful message of preparation, I want to take a step back and ask a more personal question that cuts deeper to the heart: Have you ever truly felt ready?

By this, I don’t mean an emotional feeling or a warm sense of spiritual accomplishment. I mean this: when you honestly examine your life, have you ever looked at your thoughts, your words, your choices, your habits, and asked, “If Jesus returned right now at this very moment, would I be ashamed to meet Him, or could I genuinely stand before Him without shrinking away?” That question is far deeper than we usually admit. There’s a chance that many of us haven’t asked it in a long time. Some of us avoid it. And if Lutheran Christians are ever placed under the microscope, one of our most persistent struggles is that we tend to domesticate grace. That’s not to say we deny it, but that we tend to soften it, tame it, and cheapen it.

This cheapening shows itself in countless ways. We proclaim Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, and To God’s Glory Alone, and these Solas faithfully summarize the heart of what we believe. They rightly confess that salvation is God’s gift,

grounded in His Word and received through faith in Christ alone. To Him be all glory. But because these truths are so familiar to us, we can begin to treat them as slogans rather than realities, as background noise instead of the truth of God's Word that shapes our entire lives. We hear "grace" and assume it means God must be endlessly tolerant of our sins. We hear "faith alone" and use it as an excuse to avoid self-examination like the plague. We hear "Christ alone" and quietly assume He will overlook what we refuse to repent of.

In other words, the more we talk about grace, the easier it becomes to treat readiness for Christ's coming as something that requires no thought, no urgency, no repentance at all. Advent exposes this. John the Baptist exposes this. He is speaking to us directly when he says, "And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." In other words, no heritage, no title, and no good work will grant you the forgiveness, life, and salvation you need. So, before we can hear his good news, we must first hear his warning: Readiness begins with honesty.

This honesty is not what most people would expect. Many would tell you that readiness starts with fixing up your spiritual life, doubling down on repentance, and putting together a strict regimen of good works, discipline, and improvement. They will tell you that you are not ready until you feel emotionally and spiritually prepared to meet the Lord. But that is not why I asked you the question. I did not ask whether you had ever truly felt ready to send you into a frenzy of "trying harder" or scrambling to "be better" as if readiness were something you could do on your own.

No, the honesty we must face as the people of God is much simpler to explain, but far harder to apply. It is the honesty of admitting that we are poor, helpless sinners standing before a God who has given us gifts we never deserved. As Isaiah writes, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." Yet he goes on to confess, "But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." Even in our unworthiness, God Himself shapes and forms His people.

You did not deserve your baptism, yet God washed you for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. You did not deserve the faith imparted to you through the Word by the Holy Spirit, yet He planted it in your heart. You did not deserve to be gathered into the household of God, brought here to receive His gifts, and to offer the meager sacrifice of thanksgiving, yet He brought you here. You did not deserve the ongoing forgiveness, the strengthening of body and soul, the life and salvation offered to you at the Sacrament of the Altar, yet the Words of Christ in the upper room will be proclaimed, and the gift will be offered to those who believe.

## **II. Are You Ready?**

What I want you to see is that readiness doesn't begin with proving ourselves to God. It begins with acknowledging the truth: everything that makes us ready is something God has done for us, not something we have achieved. And until we are honest about our utter dependence on

His grace, we cannot be ready in any meaningful sense of the word. And into this very human unreadiness, God raises up a voice. He raised up a strange man in camel's hair, eating locust and wild honey, standing in the wilderness, calling the people to the only readiness that matters. John the Baptist appears, not to flatter our efforts, but to prepare our hearts by exposing our need and pointing us to the One who fulfills it.

Once the Word of God brings us to acknowledge our utter dependence on Him and once the façade drops and the truth is confessed, then and only then does Christ begin His work in us. His light shines first in repentance, exposing what is dark, crooked, and diseased within us. And from that repentance, the fruit He Himself produces begins to grow. It is God's work and God's work alone that teaches us to see the evil festering in our own hearts because of sin and to turn to the One mightier than John the Baptist—the One born in Bethlehem, crucified at Calvary, and risen for the salvation of the world.

This is exactly what Scripture describes in the words of the prophet Ezekiel:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:25–27)

Do you see the pattern? Not one line speaks of what you're doing. Every sentence belongs to Him. Repentance, cleansing, renewal, and obedience are not the marks of a person who has finally made themselves “ready,” but the gifts of a God who makes the unready ready by His grace alone. This is the Gospel at work, and we cannot miss it. The same Lord Jesus who calls His people to repentance is the same Lord who supplies it. The same God who exposes sin through the Law is the same God who forgives it by His Gospel. The same gracious and loving Christ who calls you and me to bear fruit is the same Christ who plants, nourishes, and brings that fruit to completion.

So, I have great news to share with you! He is not waiting for you to get ready. He is the One who makes you ready. All glory and praise be to Him who has clothed us in His righteousness and has given us a new life. The voice crying in the wilderness prepares the way, but the Lamb of God walks that way all the way to the cross for you.

### **III. Wheat and Chaff**

I'll ask you once again: have you ever truly felt ready? Are you ready? Here's the answer Scripture gives: because of sin, none of us were ready. Not one. Left to ourselves, we are the chaff that is fit only for the fire. But here is the miracle of Advent grace: the righteousness of Christ makes us ready. The One whom John proclaimed, whose winnowing fork is in His hand, is also the One who steps into the fire for us. You and I, once the chaff, have been made wheat by His doing, gathered into His barn, claimed as His own, destined for the Kingdom of Heaven.

And since Christ has made us wheat, let us live as wheat. Where justice can be brought, let us bring it. Where sin can and should be turned from, let us turn from it. Where compassion can be given, let us give it freely. Not as people trying to earn readiness, but as people already made ready by the grace of God. Let this season of Advent be a reminder to return again and again to the One who alone prepares our hearts by His Word.

After all, it is not a season of self-improvement; it is a season of expectation. It reminds us that Christ came once in humility, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and He will come again in glory, wrapped in majesty. And between those two comings, we live as His people. We live repentant, forgiven, and watchful. So, as we move deeper into this holy season, lift up your heads. Fix your eyes on the coming Christ. He is the One who makes the unready ready, who transforms chaff into wheat, and who gathers His people safely into His eternal kingdom. And on the Day when He comes again, you will not shrink back in fear. You will stand in the righteousness He has already given you. Because the One who comes is the One who has already come for you.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott