SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE ADVENT 2014
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
THE COLLECT   JEREMIAH 23.5

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"Should old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?"…wrote poet Robert Burns in 1788…*"Should old acquaintance be forgot, and Auld Lang Syne?"*

Auld Lang Syne roughly translates from the Scottish as *days gone by*. It stirs up memories of the year just ended…and hope for a brighter and more peaceful New Year.

The Sunday Next Before Advent is all about getting things stirred up. The Collect opens with the words…"Stir up…" (in Latin, *excita*). In it we are asking God to stir up his power…and our wills. What are we getting stirred up about?

In the Sarum Mass…the Mass used at Salisbury and eventually throughout England…the collects for the five Sundays preceding Christmas all began with the word…"Excita"…"Stir up. "

The Book of Common Prayer preserves the first of these collects and we heard it today. Some of the ancient collects appear in the Liturgy for the Blessing and Lighting of the Advent Wreath. Let's listen for those words…*Stir up*…on the Sundays in Advent…and remember what they mean.

The Collect also gives today its special Anglican nickname…Stir up Sunday. In Victorian times…people would go to Mass and hear the words "Stir up" in the collect. It would remind them it was time to put together and "stir up" the Christmas pudding…so it would be ready in time for Christmas.

Today is not primarily about stirring up Christmas pudding. It is the Church's New Year's Eve…a celebration that lasts all week until next Sunday…Advent Sunday…the Church's New Years Day.

The Sunday Next Before Advent is a season of preparation for Advent. It is much like the Pre-Lenten Season get us ready for Lent. Both Advent and Lent are the penitential seasons that focus our attention toward the two great events in the life of Jesus…his birth…and his death. We should be spending time calling to mind our shortcomings and committing ourselves to doing better.

Secular New Year's Eve celebrations often involve making resolutions for the New Year…"I will try to be a better person". Stirring up memories about past bad behavior doesn't do us any good unless we intend to do something about that behavior…and make some changes…for the better.

In the Collect we ask God to stir up his power and our wills…without his power, our wills just aren't where they need to be. Where they need to be is in the business of doing good works and seeing the results of our works grow and prosper…getting other people "stirred up"…of pleasing God…and getting ready to welcome Jesus on Christmas Day.

Jeremiah talks about pleasing God and doing what's best for others. In 597 BC, Zedekiah, king of Judah, signed a pact with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and agreed to work for him. Ignoring warnings from Jeremiah and his own family, Zedekiah double-crossed Nebuchadnezzar with disastrous consequences. In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, took its people into slavery, and killed Zedekiah's family.

But Jeremiah wrote to God's people not to be discouraged and to endure their hardships with patience. There was hope for a brighter future! God would send a savior…and he would be called **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**…and 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 Advent…his First Coming…we are preparing to celebrate at Christmas. But it's not Christmas yet…let's hold off putting up the decorations and the Christmas tree and singing Christmas carols for a while longer. We still have a lot of preparing…a lot of stirring up of our hearts and minds and wills…before we are ready for Christmas.

This is the Church's New Year's Eve. Let's make individual and collective resolutions now…to do better in our spiritual lives…to do a better job at loving God and loving others…and to always pray for lasting peace throughout the world.

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