

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

***Prayer***

Lord, we thank you that you've revealed yourself to be the one true God and for the promises that you have given to us based on your goodness and steadfastness.

AMEN

***Introduction***

Happy New Year! If you were here last Sunday, you know that we begin not a new calendar year, but a new church year today. We changed from the green of the season after Pentecost to the blue of Advent. It also means that after three years of preaching on the Epistle (series A, B, and C), I plan on moving to preaching on the first readings, usually from the Old Testament. Today, we look at the brief passage from the Prophet Jeremiah.

***Background***

When looking at any quote, or section of a writing, understanding the context in which it was written is key to understanding what the author meant. From the surrounding portions of Jeremiah, it's clear that the words we look at today were written to the people of Judah, the tribes of Dan and Benjamin, just prior to the loss to King Nebuchadnezzar of

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

Babylon and the deportation or exile of many of the Jewish leaders back to Babylon.

*Why did this happen?* Because of idolatry! In ancient times, this was primarily understood as the worship of gods, with a small g, rather than the worship of our God, capital G, whom we describe every week when we recited the Apostles, Nicene, or even my favorite, Athanasian creeds. Later in the sermon, I'll talk about some of our modern idols.

*What happened?* Let me ask you a question – who's ever been put in 'time out?' Parents sometimes do this to their children when they disobey. Unlike the Penalty Box used in hockey, a place to just 'wait it out', time out is best understood as a time of for self-reflection and repentance – a change of mind.

Now seventy years is a long time out, but this wasn't the first time the Jewish peoples had disobeyed God – remember the first generation spent forty years wandering in the desert because they were afraid of their enemies and didn't have faith that God would give them the victory that He had promised.

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

***Modern Day Idols***

Remember that idolatry is where the people of God put something or someone above the one true God that they know. Those who are outside of the faith practice the Old Testament type of idolatry – worshiping a false god.

This list isn't my own – it was compiled by Jeffery Poor, with my edits.

**Identity:** Be it gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality or some other protected class, we practice idolatry by defining ourselves **PRIMARILY** by terms such as male, female, Hispanic, Latino, Mexican, Chinese, Asian, gay, straight, . . . and the list goes on. Paul writes (Gal 3:28- 29):

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

And that promise is found in Genesis 12:1-3:

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

*Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

**Money & the Stuff it Buys:** With Black Friday deals still going on and the promised Christmas gifts and year-end bonuses ahead of us, it's not hard to see how our thoughts might be focused on money rather than on God.

But scripture is clear on this one. in his Gospel Matthew writes (6:24):

*"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

**Entertainment:** Entertainment isn't bad per se; when we create, we are reflecting the creative nature of God – we are made in His likeness and He created the whole, complex, beautiful world that He called good. However, we can make idols not only out of the products themselves, but our modern-day heroes who keep us entertained. Be it video games, board games, movies, songs, television, sports, hiking, sailing, or whatever you do in your 'spare time,' the activity can become an idol, sometimes literally taking the place of God when we choose what to do with the time the God has given us. It might also be the actors, singers, dances, players, authors, etc. who create the entertainment, with mind, body, or both, that we worship by seeking to be like them or placing their thoughts and opinions above God's, which He has revealed to use through both the written word and the living Word, Jesus.

A couple of other items are also included on the list – **sex** and our **phones**. I'll bet you can see how each of these areas, given to us by God either directly or indirectly for our benefit and enjoyment, can become an idol if misused or if we become addicted to them.

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

***Purpose***

As I alluded to earlier, there is a difference between punishment and correction. Jesus died on the cross, because God is just, and the penalty for your sin and mine needed to be paid. Just like a good parent, God corrects us, His children, when we do the wrong thing.

Sometimes, it may only take a change of perspective for us to realize our errors, such as when Nathan came to David with the story of the poor man with the one sheep, and David recognized that he, who had multiple wives, had sinned by taking the one wife of his general Uriah.

At other times, we, like Israel, may need a time-out. A period of reflection when we, like Jacob, can wrestle with God.

And, despite the title of the sermon, there really is no antidote for Idolatry – we are simultaneously sinner, the disobedient child, and saint, the perfect child, because of what our brother Jesus has already accomplished for our benefit – and we cannot help but sin. In fact, the closer we get to God, the more His light shows us just how sinful we are. We have Paul's example where he says (1 Tim 1:15):

**First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024**  
**ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY**

*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.*

**Promise**

Even though we can't stop sinning, we do have God's promise of restoration. Verse 14 says:

*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise, I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

The God whose name is "I Am," has kept this promise; as I said last week, we live in the time of **NOW** and **NOT YET**.

First the **NOW**. Jesus, THE seed (singular) of Abraham and born of the line of David according to His mother Mary, has seen that justice has been served. To reiterate what I said earlier – that the Messiah whose birth we are anticipating during this Advent season was born, lived, died

***First Sunday in Advent – December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024***  
***ANTIDOTE FOR IDOLATRY***

and rose again so that I can confidently proclaim to you that your sins have been forgiven.

As for the **NOT YET**, in our linear world, Christ has neither returned to create the new heaven and the new earth, to restore creation to its original intent, nor has he called any of you listening home, to join Him today in paradise where He sits at the right hand of the Father and reigns over a kingdom, our eternal home, that shall have no end.

AMEN