Stir Up

The lessons appointed at Morning Prayer: Psalm 39, Jeremiah 4. 23–31 and Saint Matthew 25. 31–46

Santa Barbara · Sunday, November 22, 2026 · 11:30 a.m. Holy Communion

Beloved in Christ,

This is Stir Up Sunday — the last Sunday of the Christian year, and the threshold of Advent. The Collect gives the day its name: *"Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people."* In England, this became the day for stirring the Christmas pudding, and the children took the words as a happy instruction. The custom and the Collect are not so far apart. Both are about beginning a work now so that something good may be ready when the season comes.

The Collect asks God to stir up our wills — not our feelings, not our opinions, but our wills. It is honest about what most ails us. We know what is good. We have known it for a long time. The trouble is not knowledge. The trouble is the will — sluggish, reluctant, waiting for a strength that does not come from ourselves.

If we were here for Morning Prayer, or if we read the lessons over at home, we know that the day's riches are more than what we hear at the altar alone. We are missing half of what the Church gives us if we don't read them over.

At Morning Prayer, the Church gave us Psalm 39 — the prayer of a man who resolves to take heed to his ways, discovers that self-control in his own strength only delays the problem, and at last turns to God: *"Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days."* That is not a morbid prayer. We have lived long enough to feel the shortness of the road. But the Psalmist's clarity is not despair. My days are few; therefore, let me spend them well. That is the same thing the Collect is asking for — a will stirred up by the knowledge that time matters.

The First Lesson at Morning Prayer gave us Jeremiah's vision of the world without form and void. But even there, the Lord says, *"Yet will I not make a full end."* That is the

same promise the Epistle carries: *"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch."* The Lord our Righteousness is coming. The Morning Prayer lesson and the Epistle are one voice.

The Second Lesson brought us to the Last Judgment — Christ on the throne, the sheep and the goats. The test is mercy. The righteous are surprised. They did not know they were serving Christ. They simply served the person in front of them. But the goats are not strangers to the flock. They are more like poor relatives of the sheep — people who belonged but did not notice, who assumed they were fine but missed the need at the gate. Their protest is not the defiance of the wicked. It is the bewilderment of people who never learned to hear the Shepherd's voice in the cry of the hungry. The sheep heard it. The goats heard only noise. That is what the Collect means by the fruit of good works. The will follows the ear. We have been doing those works for a long time. The Collect does not ask us to start over. It asks God to keep us awake, and to keep us hearing His voice.

And the Gospel shows us why. Our Lord sees the multitude. Philip calculates — two hundred pennyworth is not enough. Andrew brings what is there: five barley loaves and two small fishes. *"But what are they among so many?"* A child's lunch. It seems like nothing. But Andrew brings it anyway. He does not withhold the offering because it is small. He places it in the Lord's hands. Christ takes it, gives thanks, and everyone eats — as much as they would. Twelve baskets remain.

What are they among so many? We might ask the same of our prayers. A handful of us gathered in a small church, lifting up our voices — what difference does it make? But our Lord said, *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* Those prayers, small as they seem, are heard in heaven. And like the loaves, they are taken by Christ and made more than enough. The five barley loaves are our prayers. The prayer of two or three is the child's lunch placed in the Lord's hands.

Our Lord also said, *"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few."* We know something about that. We are few. The world would look at us and say the labourers are too few, the harvest too large, the strength too small. But the Gospel tells us that the

shortage is not solved by numbers. It is solved by Christ, who takes what little we bring and makes it enough. Five loaves feed five thousand. The prayers of two or three are heard in heaven. The harvest is His, and He provides what the harvest requires.

That is the Gospel's answer to the Collect. The Collect says, "Stir up our wills, that we may plenteously bring forth fruit." The Gospel says: bring what we have. Pray. The will makes the decision to bring it. The Lord does the rest. Christ can do more with a small gift placed in His hands than we can do with much held back in doubt. The Collect's word is "plenteously" — twice. Plenteous fruit. Plenteous reward. God stirs up our wills so that we may bear fruit, and then rewards that fruit beyond anything we have earned.

So here we are, at the threshold. Advent is coming. And the Collect asks God to stir up our wills — because Advent is not a season for sleeping. It is the season of watching, of expectation, of joy that has not yet arrived but is already on the way. The cry goes out at midnight: *"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."* That is the Advent cry, and it is the note the whole Christian year has been building toward.

The Bridegroom is approaching. We await the celebration of His birth in Bethlehem — God taking flesh, coming to dwell among us. We await His coming again in glory. And whether we are here to greet Him when He returns, or whether we have fallen asleep in the meantime, our hope is the same. The Lord our Righteousness is coming. He came once in humility. He will come again in glory. The oil in our lamps is the grace He gives. The Collect asks Him to stir up our wills so that our lamps do not go out before the Bridegroom arrives.

Not because we are young and strong, but because grace has ripened what the years have given us, and we are still willing to bring what we have to the Lord who makes it enough.

Let us not meet Him with wills that are asleep. Let us ask Him to stir us up — so that when the Bridegroom comes, whether in the stable or in the clouds, He finds us watching, and ready, and glad.

Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.