

ADVENT ONE, YEAR B, NOVEMBER 26, 2023-ADVENT MOVED UP 1 WEEK

Waiting is not a popular past time in our culture today. We take photos with our phones and have them instantaneously at our finger tips. We go through the drive thru at the fast food restaurants. We pay our bills over the phone and do our banking on the internet where there are no long lines of waiting people. When an elevator takes a long time to arrive, we give the button another series of rapid jabs figuring it will come faster if we do that.

Parents teach their children how to wait patiently. They say things like -"No, not now, you can have that when you're older." "Wait until your birthday." "Wait till Christmas. Just be patient. "But somewhere along the line, those lessons about waiting are forgotten, and so impatient drivers tailgate those they think are going too slow, people with very loud whispers complain about the person up front at the checkout who has an article that needs a price check, and our blood boils after pressing the number on the phone as requested by the computerized voice on the other end only to be told that we have been put on hold and that our call will be answered in approximately forty five minutes if we're lucky.

Now today in our text we hear Jesus talking about waiting. He tells a parable about a man who goes on a journey. He doesn't tell his servants where he is going or when he will come home again. He leaves his servants in charge of his home and property and gives them work to do while he is away. He then leaves and his last word to his servants as he closes the front door is to be diligent and ready for his return, whenever that might be.

To put this parable in modern terms it is not unlike parents who leave their teenage children at home to look after the house, giving them instructions on what to do and telling them what they expect their children to do while they are away. Now put yourself in the shoes of the teenager. When mom and dad have finally gone, there is that wonderful feeling of freedom. The whole house is yours. You can have your friends over to party. You can eat what you want, drink what you want, leave your clothes lying all over the place, you can stay up as late as you like and sleep in till lunchtime. Well, you might be doing that already but at least now you don't have someone yelling at you to get up or clean your room.

However, if the parents are away for a long time and the unwatered plants are looking very wilted and sad, all the food has been cleaned out of the cupboards, no more dishes will fit in the sink, and you have run out of clean underwear, the time has come to make a decision. If the mess doesn't bother you and you don't care what mom and dad will say and do then you have no worries. You will continue to ignore the mess and do what you please.

Conversely if you take seriously the instructions that were given, then you will do your best to carry them out. After all, they could come home at any time. It would be too late to get into a flurry - make beds, wash dishes, sweep floors and do a load of washing - when the car pulls into the driveway. It would even be worse if you woke up in the middle of the night to find your parents standing at the end of your bed catching you totally unprepared with the house in a mess. So it just might be better to keep the house in order.

Jesus' parable tells us to watch and be ready, while at the same time reminding us that we have jobs to do. Those jobs are doing unto others as he did unto us; giving food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, giving clothes to the poor and visiting those who are sick or in jail; when we do that we are working and waiting as Christ told us.

Now there are two kinds of waiting - passive waiting and active waiting. We can choose to wait passively. Like sitting in a waiting room at the doctor's, flicking through magazines, day dreaming a bit, just filling in time until we are called into the doctor's office. This kind of passive waiting doesn't require much energy or attention. It requires no commitment on our part. Passive waiting is all about dealing with our own concerns, and looking after our own needs.

Or we can actively wait. This waiting involves prayer, worship, mission, and deliberately living the Christian life, going out of your way to serve others and not just looking after your own needs. You know like the servant in the parable, the master's absence doesn't mean forgetting about him and what he wants you to do, but to actively wait and be prepared for whenever that moment of his arrival might be.

The work of the kingdom of God, the work of the Master has been entrusted to you and me, his servants. And he expects us to be faithful servants. There is little point in worrying and fretting over when the master will return. The most important concern we have is that we faithfully carry out the work he has given us to do so that when he does return he will find us faithfully working on those tasks he has given us. Like the parents who trust their teenagers to look after the house while they are away, Jesus trusts us to carry out his work to do until he returns.

As we begin the Advent season it is a time in the church year when we reflect on who or what we are truly waiting for. It is a time to meditate and pray about what it is that will fulfill our hearts' desires. The Good News of Advent is that the story of Advent is not a story of a God waiting to see if we human beings will finally figure it out and find God. The story of Advent is that God comes to us, and better yet, that God has already found us. We may feel like we are always waiting for something or someone, but the Good News of Advent is that God has already come to us, is coming to us, and will keep coming to us. In our waiting and seeking, we often fail to see that the gift has already been given, the gift of "God with us," the gift of Emmanuel.

The word "advent" means "coming," and that refers to the coming of Christ in the past, in the present, and in the future. Advent is saying that there is never a time when Christ is not with you, yesterday and today and tomorrow. At its deepest level, Advent is an invitation to let ourselves be found by the God who came among us as child, by the God who comes into our hearts, by the God who will meet us in every future. In the waiting, in the finding, in the daily living of our lives, we have already been found and loved by God who is with us always, even in our lowest moments when we're given to despair, God is with us to the end of the ages.

There is a story about a spot on the coast of Wales where there is a giant rock, right at the seaside, and people gather on it to watch spectacular sunsets. On clear evenings, as the sun drops into the sea the whole horizon turns into a kaleidoscope of colors. One night a beat-up, old car drove up and in the car was an elderly couple with their disabled son. He lay in the back seat, limp and exhausted. Then, as the great ball of fire began its final descent to the sea, the couple got out of the car and came round to

the back seat. They reached in, hoisted their son up to the sitting position, and maneuvered him forward to the edge of the seat. And just as the sun in its full flame, in a final burst of glory, dropped below the rim of the world, the parents reached under their boy's chin, raised his head, and pointed him out there toward the horizon. An observer watching all this said, "And I knew at that moment that God can dazzle us with all the magnificence of the universe, but that the secret of the universe lies in a love that comes to us in our weakness and in our need."

The season of Advent begins today. It is the season of hope. Stay alert. Keep awake. Watch and wait. Lift up your heads. Look to the horizon. Look to the future. Look for the God who comes to us, who came to us, who is with us, now and until the end of the ages. Amen.