

Advent – waiting for the arrival of something or someone who is important.

What are we waiting for?

Luke 21:25-36 (Inclusive Bible)

"Signs will appear in the sun, the moon, and the stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish, distraught at the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the earth. The powers of the heavens will be shaken. After that people will see the Chosen One coming on a cloud' with great power and glory. When these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near at hand."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree or any other tree. You see when they sprout leaves and know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things happening, know that the reign of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. The heavens and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your spirits do not become bloated with indulgence, drunkenness and worldly cares. That day will suddenly close in on you like a trap. It will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth, so be on your watch. Pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever comes, and to stand secure before the Chosen One."

Come to the Waiting Place

Years ago, before Meg was born, Ken and I went to Virginia to spend Christmas with my godparents. It snowed the night before we left, so our trip was beautiful. As we got closer to their house, the view began to change. Instead of snow, they had had an ice storm. Everything was encased in ice – the leaves, the signs, the roads, the power lines. It looked so beautiful... and so dangerous. We arrived safely to a cold, dark house. The power was out all over the region. The live Christmas tree that they had bought was still

in the truck, caked in ice. The men dragged it (literally) to the front porch – that’s as far as they got. As if on cue, the power came on, and we spent the afternoon baking gingerbread cookies, decorating them with icing. Then, bundled in our coats and gloves- we hung them on the frozen tree.

The next day, the thaw came. As the frozen tree melted, the cookies began to stretch and pull. Their icing smiles began to droop. Eventually, one by one, they fell to the ground and our festive tree was decorated with ghoulish heads, the bodies littered the ground.

Sometimes it seems like we are like those little gingerbread people, living in a place that is sometimes beautiful and sometimes deadly. Waiting.... waiting and hoping that the environment doesn’t change in such a way that we are left with nothing.

Advent is the time when we wait. We are hovering between the promise of God and the realization of those promises. Hovering and hoping....

But this waiting game can be difficult, especially as it stretches on year to year, generation to generation, age to age. The promises that Jeremiah spoke of so eloquently touch us as much as they did the people who first heard them thousands of years ago:

The days are surely coming, says 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. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

What a wonderful vision. No more war or terrorism. The boundaries that separate people from each other melt away. Justice and peace all around the world. Technology only used to create tools that help our society to grow and thrive because the need for weapons and bombs are gone. Instead of focusing all our attention on security and defense, we can create a world where all are healthy and whole. The threat of AIDS or Covid can be

eliminated and so can hunger and poverty. Can you even imagine what that would be like?

We hear these promises from God... and all we can do is wait.

We heard the story earlier of Dr. Seuss' vision of the Waiting Place. Advent is the Waiting Place. All of us have been called to spend more time than we want to in the Waiting Place.

From Egypt to the wilderness, from Babylonian exile to Roman oppression, God's people have stayed in the Waiting Place... sometimes for generations at a time, longing for the God of Sinai... waiting for the burning bush to tear open the heavens and come down and make all things new. The people demand God's presence – waiting for God to intervene in history again. We acknowledge our failure; we confess our sins...

And we wait. In our waiting, we come to the point when we realize that all strength is in God's hands.

Yet we do not want to wait... even for God. Ours is a culture that wants it and wants it right now! And advances in technology mean that we wait less and less to meet our needs. It's all available in the push of a button.

But whatever technology has done to our culture, God's ways have not changed. Throughout the Bible, God is the One who takes the initiative while the people can only wait. And today... we can only sit down in the Waiting Place, and... wait.

We must wait, just as Israel waited in exile. We must wait... like a new mother waiting for the baby to be born. We must wait like a father waiting for a teenager to become an adult, or like a child waiting for Christmas.

God still says to us, "Be still and know that I am God." Advent reminds us to be still, to make ourselves quiet so that we can receive the truth, a truth that we have been culturally conditioned not to receive. Advent is the waiting place. The waiting place of Advent prepares us for God's greatest event.

While in the Waiting Place, we need to get quiet and prepare ourselves, like a child waiting to hear a bedtime story. In the Waiting Place, we will all hear the familiar but always new story of a starry night in Bethlehem as God intervenes in history again. We hear of new parents in a manger, of shepherds and Magi... it all begins anew. In the Waiting Place we enter a place of preparation before revelation and proclamation descend upon us, like the light from the North Star.

This is nothing new - God reminds us over and over how important waiting is for our faith. Isaiah tells us that "They who wait upon God shall renew their strength" and Paul writes: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth God's Son..." We wait for God to get the world ready. We wait for God to get **us** ready.

Remember that Christmas tree and the drooping gingerbread people? After its dreary beginning, that same tree was planted in front of my god parents' house in the spring. Now, decades later, it stands tall and strong, offering shelter and beauty... offering hope for new life. The waiting place is not a permanent stop on life's journey. It is but a resting place as God prepares us for the destination. Isaiah's vision of peace and prosperity is still alive in our hearts. God's vision of a new reality, ushered in with the birth of a little baby boy, continues. While we sit in the waiting place, we can have confidence in the reality that Isaiah proclaimed.

So hear the good news that emerges out of the waiting place: The new heavens and the new earth are coming. God is faithful. The promise that God made to our fathers and mothers, to Abraham and Sarah, to all God's children, is coming true. So, as Jesus tells us, stay awake. Be ready. Because what lies ahead of the waiting place is beyond our imaginations!

Amen!

Invitation

May the God of hope be with you, as we open wide our anxious hearts!
We open them to God's peace. And give thanks and share our joy.

In this space and time, we offer God our love and praise.

Prayer

O Waiting God, we see the dawn of hope resting on the horizon and your rays of love reach deep into our doubting hearts. As we prepare to celebrate the newness of this season- and wait to see how the Christ will appear in our world. A glimmer of hope reaches out to us... beckons to us... invites us to breathe and wait...

Our story tells us that the Christ child whose birth we anticipate will one day sit at tables with strangers and friends, building relationships filled with love and grace.

We see this as he fed the thousands, turned water into wine, and ate with dear ones the night before his death.

He took the bread, blessed it, and broke it. *Eat in remembrance of me.*
He took the cup, and in his blessing, reminded them that when they sipped from the fruit of the vine To *drink in remembrance of him.*

Jesus. The Christ. Emmanuel – God with us.

Light of the World. The Word of Life.

No matter how we know him

Or what name we call him,

He is our hope, our peace, our joy, and our love.

May the Spirit bless us and these elements as we commune to remember him.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

For the nourishment of spirit, mind, and body,
For hope that we begin to see,
And for comfort from the Prince of Peace,
We share our gratitude, Gracious God.
Encourage us in these shortened days.
Through the long nights of this season,
May your hope carry us until dawn arrives again.

Benediction

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another
and for all, just as we abound in love for you. May your hearts be filled
with Hope. Amen