

**"THE WAIT IS ON!"**

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**Mark 13:24-37; Isaiah 64:1-5a**

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There can be some time confusion regarding Advent. Which time frame are we talking about?

In the first one, God promised Israel a Messiah, a savior. The prophets spoke often about this one who would come to redeem Israel. Isaiah proclaimed: "A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:1-9). This promised one, "will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority will grow and there shall be endless peace." (Isaiah 9:6-7) God's people longed for his coming. They waited, not always well. Often, they grew tired and despaired, losing faith that God would ever come through. So, they sought after other gods. They did whatever it took to bolster their economy and secure their lifestyle. It was every man for himself, king, merchant, master. Often, they abandoned and forgot the biblical imperatives to take care of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger among them. They trusted in horses and chariots, the implements of war and even bargained away their country's independence for any strong man who promised security. Finally, this first advent season came to end, that time of waiting was over. The promised one was born, not as they expected or dreamed. He grew in wisdom and stature, preached and taught and healed. The power of God was in him; his name was Jesus. We have seen his glory and call him Messiah, which in Greek is the Christ.

We are not waiting for Christmas; Christ has born. Our Christmas is the celebration of his birth, the culmination of that first advent. The period of days between now and Christmas is not the focus of our waiting.

The first advent is instructive for us. It speaks of God who promises and can be trusted. It shows the pitfalls into which our Jewish forebearers in the faith fell and warns us of the consequences of similar actions of control and fear rather than trust. Charles Wesley Naylor tells a story about a king who was growing old and had no heir to succeed him. He announced to his people that he would choose his heir from among the young men of the country. After much time, three stood out from the others but seemed

equal to the tasks. The final test was to be a footrace. The winner would win the prize.

The day came. The course was set. The contestants were at the starting line. Right before the race was to start a man came to each of the contestants and said secretly to him, "The king is taking special note of you. Do not run until the king gives us a special signal." The race began with a bang. One bounded forward quickly, then hesitated and stopped. Then the second sprang forward which set them both off for the prize. The third stood still, looking anxiously at the king and the two runners. The king paid him no attention. He thought himself forgotten and soon realized all was lost.

The two finished the race together. They were brought back and all three stood before the king. To the two, the king said, "Were you not told to wait until I gave the signal? Why then did you run." The first replied, "I forgot." The second said, "I thought it would be but a minute till you gave the signal. Seeing the other running, I ran also." To the third, the king asked, "Why did you not run?" and the young man replied, "Because you did not give me the signal." "My son", said the king, "I knew that you could run, but I did not know that you could wait."

Waiting is difficult. Even when we know when the wait will be over – time stretches out – days can feel like weeks and weeks like lifetime. But waiting that has no arrival date is unbearable: waiting on hold, waiting for a diagnosis, waiting for the traffic to start moving again when you are stuck on the parking lot we call the interstate, waiting for this pandemic to end. When we do not know when the wait will be over, it makes it extremely hard to wait.

But waiting is a test. It is always a test. It is a test of our trust in what we have been told and the one who has promised. We, who believe, are in a time of waiting for God to act and our Lord to come in glory. Those who have waited on God, past and present, come to know that God's promises are sure even if God's watch keeps a different time than ours.

We wait in faith and hope for our Lord to come in glory, but it does not make it easy. Waiting takes patience, something that is not natural for us. We are told in Paul's letter to the Galatians that patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joyce Meyer who is often speaking to women on cable tv said, "I believe that a trusting attitude and a patient attitude go hand in hand. When you trust God, you are able to be more patient. Patience is not just about waiting for something...it is about how you wait or your attitude while waiting."

The waiting of believers is not to be with inactivity. It is not sitting on our hands and content with "knowing" Jesus. We are not to be calendar watching – just waiting, marking off the days. We are supposed to be busy. Such is the instruction of Jesus in the final paragraph of today's gospel reading. He says, Be aware, keep alert, stay awake! Our waiting is like servants put in charge, each with his work to do. When Christ comes, he expects to find us faithfully working even as we are faithfully waiting.

Lamar Williamson tells a story from the early years of our nation. A state legislature was meeting when an eclipse, happened. The legislators panicked; some moved to adjourn. But one person stood up and declared: "Mister Speaker, if it is not the end of the world and we adjourn, we shall appear to be fools. If it is the end of the world, I should choose to be found doing my duty. I move, Sir, that candles be brought in."

That should be our plan: to be busy about the Lord's work. We are to be in worship and prayer. We are to share the good news and teach the gospel. We are to imitate the Christ. We are to show kindness and strive for righteousness. We are to share what we have been given with those who have needs. We are to live imitating the Christ so that his love shows in all we do. We are to bring in the light to scatter the darkness.

The good and faithful servant is the one who is busy when the master returns. Just sitting and waiting, leads to death not life. When we are busy time flies, and our days are full. We are not busy, worried about when Christ will come but seeking to be faithful and hasten his coming.

Several have asked me in the last few months, "Is this the end time?" Honestly, I do not know—nobody does! I think the time of Christ's coming is not yet. The question for our concern is one found in Luke 18 following another parable, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Ours is not the time to do nothing. We are in advent until Christ comes in glory and our advent is to always be a time of preparation.