

Sermon Advent 1. 2022. Waiting well.

The Buddhists tell this story. A young man came to the master and asked, "How long will it take me to attain enlightenment?" And the master said, "Ten years." The young man was shocked. "So long?" he asked incredulously. The master said, "No, that was a mistake. It will take you twenty years." The young man asked, "Why did you double the figure?" Said the master, "Come to think of it, in your case it will probably be thirty." The young man didn't do waiting well.

Have you ever walked up to call the elevator, pressed the button for it to arrive and as it lights up you stand and wait, and as you do someone else arrives and reaching past you presses the already lit up arrive button, usually a couple of times, as if this will somehow make the elevator arrive quicker than you ever could? Perhaps they are blessed with a power that you don't have. Or maybe they just don't do waiting well.. We seem to live in times where instant gratification is demanded, and impatient people have the waiting ability and attention span of a gnat. The Otis elevator company do endless studies and draw all kinds of conclusions about waiting behavior.

It seems one reason we are impatient waiting for elevators is because we are conditioned to think that we must be productive every second of every day. For some a second lost is a dollar lost. We want everything to be faster so that we can do more, produce more. And if we don't do it, it won't get done. For others, waiting is simply not something they are prepared to do.

Now while we are talking about seconds in elevator land, let's compare this to the waiting people of God, who have now been waiting for two thousand years. Waiting for God's reign of peace and justice. Waiting for the heavens to open and Jesus to come down.

Because Advent waiting is different. Waiting in Advent is not a condition to be tolerated, it is something we as Christians are invited to do productively. First of all it lies in hope. And hope means more than just waiting around. It is the conscious decision to see the world in a different way from how many others see it, to look through the eyes of faith, to know that the present reality will not have the last word. Hope is what gives each one of us the ability to lead faithful lives.

Advent. A time for waiting then. And also a time for coming. A time for cleaning out any and everything that gets in the way of our waiting. We are invited to stay awake, stay alert and watch. How ironic that it falls at a time when in our society we are about to enter the retail -frenzied lead up to Christmas. After all, we are told the lighting of the tree in the Rockefeller Centre is the official start of Christmas. Well here's the thing. It is not. For here lies the challenge for Christians. Despite all the demands that are made on all of us, in Advent we are invited to stay awake, stay alert, watch and find

stillness. And there is a much bigger picture than just thinking it's 4 weeks countdown to Christmas. There is this end time Apocalyptic charge issued to mankind, to us both in St Paul's warning to the Romans, and in Matthew's gospel:

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, .. put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Keep awake for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Therefore you must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

But let's be honest. The message about waiting for what is coming can become old and tired in our minds. And that's part of the challenge of the life of faith. This challenge is in patiently enduring and continuing to do what is fitting for the incarnation of the child of God, and maintaining our focus in a world that often doesn't want to hear it, often does not share our values or our hopes, and which often makes it hard to keep faithful. I remember the story about the two women overheard in the Hallmark store browsing greeting cards this time of the year, one rather irritated saying to her friend "Look at this, now they're even bringing religion into Christmas!"

When the Church talks about Jesus is coming! Heaven is coming! Something wonderful is coming! Hold on, be faithful, and wait, let us remind ourselves that God always does things His way, and that coming day will most likely be quite different from we might expect. Jesus knew that this was going to happen. That is why He said, **"Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life,...keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."**

The problem in our modern world is that we are all **'weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life.'** Dissipation means wasting your life on things of no significance or value. And then there are the **"worries of life"**. These are what weigh most of us down. We worry about all sorts of things: money, family, weather, the economy, our health. Life is every day, and its dangers, threats, worries, and fears are always clamoring for our attention.

I wonder which ones have your attention? Many of the above I'm afraid have mine, plus worrying about things that probably won't even happen.

Jesus tells us to be on guard against all this but it seems almost impossible to avoid these demons

in our lives. So how can you keep the sense of expectation, and not give in to the worries and temptations of life? By being **"on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man."** In other words, you have to do it by vigilance, and prayer, constant, regular, fervent prayer. You do it by knowing that these temptations are coming, and that you have no strength in yourself to withstand them, and so you call on God and trust Him to bring you through. God knows it's hard for us fragile Christians to hold ourselves in faith and readiness by our own power or choice.

So as you watch and pray be encouraged that the battle for your salvation has already been fought by Jesus on the cross, and His resurrection victory. Jesus has poured out on you the gift of everlasting life and resurrection from your grave. He did it in your Baptism, and He feeds you with the bread and wine of His body and blood each week, which is all the strength for your journey in faith that you need.

As we wait, we want to be sure to stand firm in our faith, straighten up, lift up our heads in expectation in this advent journey. And in order to accomplish all of that, we need to do exactly as Jesus said, which is to be on guard and alert at all times, to watch, and to pray. AMEN

