

The change of a liturgical season, when all the colors in the church change and the mood of our services shift intentionally shift a little bit, become times to remind ourselves of the tradition we inherit in the church. In Advent, we dress the altar and ourselves in blue, a color traditionally associated with Mary. Churches will change to sing either O Come, O Come Emmanuel or the Song of Mary to remember the coming of Jesus in Christmas. We spend four Sundays lighting the Advent wreath to remind ourselves that we wait on the light of Christ to come to the world and, like watching the sun rise at dawn, watch the light increase over the season building to Christmas. And then there's that most important ritual of the Advent season, which is open to anyone in the practice of their own spiritual life: the chocolate Advent calendar.

For those of you who have never seen this, you're missing out. Every day there's a piece of chocolate. And each one is a different shape associated with Christmas – trees, stars, packages with bows. Building up to Christmas. I have had one of these every Christmas I can remember, shipped to me by an aunt who sends these just as religiously as I consume them. When I was a kid I would have a hard time waiting. Sometimes I would juuuust want to eat just tomorrow's so I could have two pieces today. Or take a peek to see what shape the chocolate would be.

Chocolate is a particularly appropriate frame for this Sunday. This is the Sunday we light that pink candle in the Advent wreath. It actually has a name – Gaudete Sunday – from the word in Latin that means Rejoice, and it's one of two days out of the year that it's appropriate for the altar colors and stoles and such to be pink. Advent used to have a focus more on repentance – much more with the Prepare Ye The Way of the Lord make his paths straight that we heard last week. This Sunday was supposed to act as a break because apparently everyone needs a break from repentance sometimes.

In all these themes – rejoicing, repentance, or anticipation – Advent has started to become a time to think about how we can remain calm in what is a season that is now famously busy and stressful as school years wrap up, visiting families might be planned, and presents tend to be bought. Waiting goes against all of that... right?

The funny thing about anticipation is that it amplifies a feeling. Like my six year old self's difficulty at waiting a whole day to find out what the next chocolate piece would be, we don't exactly like waiting or not knowing.

Anticipation is still powerful for adults – there was a study a few years ago that investigated how folks seem to be at their happiest just before taking a vacation they have planned.

And, of course, for Christmas there is the anticipation of a present. The act of having a package sitting and waiting to be opened, knowing there is something but not knowing what, is a really good way of capturing something like being on edge with the coming of the Kingdom of God – one knows something is coming... one is told one will like it... but you don't really know what it is.

Anticipation can also be nerve racking. Something worth considering with our reading this morning. Our reading from James on patience is nice, but it was also taken out of context. The verses that come just before our reading this morning start off with:

“Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you [...]” ehh... it goes on like that for a bit.

Rejoice in the Lord, right?

Likewise every Sunday this month we have been singing the Magnificat, the song Mary sings upon finding out she is pregnant. “All generations will call me blessed” is nice enough, but then we get to “he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” and I have to remember that I’m a pretty proud, well off person.

Maybe I should be on edge just a little more when we talk about anticipation with Advent. When we pray every Sunday “Thy kingdom come they will be done on earth as it is in heaven...” it makes me wondering... what am I getting myself into here?

And the fact of the matter is... I don’t know.

Our Gospel this morning offers a glimpse.

This is about trust. This is about not knowing, about being a little unnerved at what might happen

“Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you [...]”

“All generations will call me blessed”

“he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty”

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Where is this peace to be found? The answer is clear. In weakness. First of all, in our own weakness, in those places of our hearts where we feel most broken, most insecure, most in agony, most afraid. Why there? Because there, our familiar ways of controlling our world are being stripped away; there we are called to let go from doing much, thinking much, and relying on our self sufficiency. Right there where we are weakest the peace which is not of this world is hidden.