

**1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT**  
**December 2, 2019**

Text: Luke 21:25-36

Theme: We Wait

Some holiday travelers had to wait for their plane to arrive. It was late because of inclement weather and there were indications that the flight might get canceled. As the hours ticked by the crowd grew more and more restless and impatient. Out of frustration people started to check in at the ticket counter to plead their case on why they needed to arrive at their destinations as soon as possible.

One angry passenger pushed his way to the front of the line, slammed his ticket down on the counter and announced that he must be on a flight now and he must be given first class. In an attempt to keep her composure the flight attendant told the gentleman that she would get to him as soon as possible but he must wait in line like everyone else. Quickly he responded with – *Do you have any idea who I am?*

Without hesitation she smiled, picked up her intercom and broadcast throughout the airport: *We have a passenger here at the gate who does not know who he is. If anyone can help him find his identity then please come to Gate 17.*

From Psalm 25:

Make me to know your ways, O Lord, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me for you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all day long.

It is perhaps one of the reasons Advent is so hard to embrace. Advent forces us to wait and I do not know of anyone who likes to wait. We certainly hate it when we have to sit in traffic. We shop on-line so we can receive packages within a day or two of ordering something we seem to need now. We see the words *breaking news* come across our screens but it just as quickly vanishes within a 24-hour period. Any information we lack on any given topic is quickly available to us because all we have to do is Google the question to get an immediate answer. Our desire for speed is nothing new but the digital age has simply taken us to the next level in our pursuit of instant gratification.

As the pace of our world increases it takes a toll on our spiritual life. On this first Sunday in Advent we are asked to consider what it means to wait all day long for our Lord. Our culture teaches us that *to wait* is unacceptable and *being made to wait* is an unpardonable sin. We in the church teach that *to wait* is necessary and *being made to wait* is an act of faith.

Advent is to be a season of reflection rather than a season of rushing around. It is so easy to get caught up in the hectic buzz of Christmas preparations but instead we are invited to slow down and to draw our attention to what is most important – the faithfulness of God who sent the long-awaited Messiah into our midst.

Think about the Israelites who for centuries looked and longed for the coming Messiah. For generations they passed down the promise to their children and grandchildren but they (themselves) never saw his arrival. How tempting it must have been to give up the waiting! Yet many clung to their faith and kept looking for the Lord, trusting that God would be faithful to his Word. And God was faithful. It just took a really, really long time!

Our anticipation of Christmas lasts for only one month but in Advent we are reminded that we are still a waiting people after December 25. We have the promise of a Second Advent still to come. We are told that Christ is coming back to make all things new. And just like the people in the Old Testament, there are some in this world who will tell us that we have been waiting too long. Some will tempt us into believing that if it has not happened yet then it will never take place. But those of us who cling to our faith will keep looking.

For you, O Lord, we wait all day long. Instant gratification is not vital for those of us who believe in God through Christ. We wait even if it is hard work. We wait even if it tests our faith. We know there are no guarantees that our waiting will end in our lifetime but that should not matter because we will wait. And in the meanwhile we do not sit by idle. We have clear instructions on what we are to do.

In Luke 21 we are told to be alert and ready at all times. We are not to waste our time indulging in excessive pleasures. We are not to worry so much but instead we are to be watchful.

At the same time we are to be confident, eager for the events that Jesus describes in our lesson as they will mark the beginning of the deliverance of the Christian community. The coming of the Son of Man will be threatening to those who have used their power to abuse others but it will release those who are oppressed.

I believe the Advent season is a great opportunity to think differently about time. The waiting reminds us that this is God's story, his plan, and his promises. It helps us think differently about both the present time and the future to come. In the present moment every day is pure gift and the future points to our ultimate hope.

With amazing skill I believe Luke put enough distance between the events of his day and the end of time (the present and the future) to make room for the mission of the church. We wait with a clear purpose. When we take the time to circle back to our lesson from three weeks ago (that is also found in Luke 21) we discover Jesus inside the temple as others stand on the outside in admiration of their beautiful building. With pride they look at how the gifts of the people have bejeweled their house of worship. Inside the temple Jesus encounters a widow who has been neglected.

It does not escape me that Luke puts this story as the prelude to the talk about the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus witnessed firsthand how the resources and gifts put in the treasury were used to adorn their temple without thought of those who were in need ... his prediction was not just about breaking apart the bricks and mortar but about his desire to do this incredible reversal.

During this Advent season we will hear the familiar words from Mary as she sings her song of praise to God: It is he who will bring down the powerful from their thrones and lift up the lowly. It is he who will fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. In the meanwhile we who follow Christ are to remain steadfast in our ministry and trust that the Holy Spirit will provide the words and inspiration we need to witness to the gospel through word and deed and prayer. It is for this that our Lord waits for us as we wait for him.

Advent is so hard to embrace because we hate to wait. But every now and then we might think that we are seeing signs of the end and then we panic. We should have used our time more wisely. We should have been better prepared. But those thoughts do not linger long because it never happens. So we wait and we wait and we wait some more but know this ... we never wait in vain. Each day counts and each day has a purpose and in the church our purpose is to be the agent that makes that great reversal take place.

Advent gives us the occasion to start over. It is a fresh beginning. It is a way to mark time. With the vision of the end of times in the back of our minds we can live each day alert to what God wants us to see. And then when Christ comes again we can stand up and raise our heads with confidence. For you, O Lord, we wait all day long. Amen