

Jesse Perkins  
Wednesday, December 2, 2020  
Year B, Advent 1

Isaiah 64:1-9  
1 Corinthians 1:3-9  
Mark 13:24-37

“Are we there yet.”

- One of the hardest things for me growing up was enduring a long road trip
  - Most of my memories were of us all piling into a car and leaving out for our destination
  - My brother and I in the backseat, and dad and mom up front
  - And back in my day- I’ve been waiting a long time to say that- we did not have cell phones and internet!
    - Now days our minivan has its own wifi network and data plan
    - And Gaius can see a map that tells him where we are and how much longer.
  - But it doesn’t matter- we still get asked that question a million times
  - Kids have a poor sense of time
  - It does not matter how many times you tell them how much longer it will be, they just keep asking
  - This all brought back memories of high school band too, and those long bus trips to Friday night football games
  - We once had a band director who when we would ask how much longer, he would always respond: “five more minutes”
    - No matter if we had just left the school, or were pulling into our destination- “5 more minutes”
  - Whether it be on a long band trip or a long drive on a family vacation, the best way to pass the time is to develop coping strategies
  - First, there is the all time favorite one of sleep.
  - My parents used to leave very early in the morning so that us kids would sleep most of the drive
    - I am slowly becoming my parents, because we did that exact same thing the last time we drove to Arkansas!
  - Once we were awake, we would play games like punch buggy, the license plate game, or maybe pick a fight with a sibling to pass the time
  - Anything to make us forget we were still waiting to get there.

- And all of this waiting made me think of... Advent
- And yes, I realize that it is already now Advent 2, but somehow it's been a little harder for me to get into this mindset this year
- Time feels a little differently these days, Lisa described it a couple of weeks ago as "strangers to ourselves"
- But maybe that's exactly what we need to better understand Advent and immerse ourselves in it.
- I feel like a kid on a road trip this Advent, in so many ways wondering when we are going to get there
- Constantly asking God, "are we there yet," and God continued reassurance that we are getting closer and closer.
- So why are we called to wait in Advent?
  - Our Gospel is from Mark, which is perfect for this early in Advent because it does not contain any of the birth narratives
  - In other words, we are not exactly expecting to hear about shepherds, mangers, and wise men just yet
  - So we get to read how this Gospel uniquely records the start of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ
    - We catch a glimpse of what is uniquely important to Mark
  - Mark says, this is the beginning of the Good news of Jesus Christ, THE SON OF GOD
  - And for Mark, all of this gets started here with John the Baptist, and Jesus' baptism
  - He quotes back to the Isaiah passage, which we also got to hear this morning
  - "Prepare the Way of the Lord". "Make his paths straight"
  - It is then, after the work has been done- the paths made straight, and after God's time is fulfilled and creation is ripe with readiness
  - That is when God will come- when God's Kingdom will realized
  - Advent is looking forward to God fulfilling the promise of a new way
  - Of God making things right again
  - And it takes on a dual meaning for us: it is about remembering the start of this redemptive process, and looking forward to its completion
  - First, we are waiting for the birth of the Christ child, for Christmas
  - This is the historical remembrance- we look back and hear the story of God coming in the flesh
  - We light the candles one week at a time on the Advent wreath and count down the days

- It was a sign of new hope, of God's renewed effort to mend what was broken
- But it is not complete, and along with waiting in remembrance of Christ coming long ago,
- We wait for Christ to come again to complete what was begun, and it feels like a long journey in between
- As I mentioned earlier, I think we are much more familiar with this space of the in between this year,
  - With us all waiting for a vaccine that we hope will be effective and available
  - Waiting for a return to seeing friends and family regularly and easily
  - Waiting to throw away these masks for ever
- In some ways we have been in a mixture of Advent and Lent since back in March- not in all ways, but definitely in some
- I think we are also perhaps more acutely aware of the difficulty of our task during Advent- of what Advent is asking of us- than before
- Now we know. Our generation keenly knows what it means to wait with cautious and optimistic anticipation.
- And it is hard, isn't it?
- During Advent's dual waiting, I believe if we are not careful, we engage the same coping mechanisms as we did as children on road trips, and maybe in pandemics
  - One of them is to try sleep through it.
    - Perhaps it is because we have heard it so many times before that we tend to stop listening
    - Maybe we have grown a little apathetic to God's emerging kingdom, that it is just taking too long and we lose focus
    - Perhaps we are so tired already of paying attention to our world strife with conflict, unrest, and plague that we don't have room for one more
    - Yes, I feel it too
    - Whatever the reason, we can doze off, or put our heads in the sand, or throw our hands up in the air in dismay
    - Jesus speaks to us when he says, stay awake.
    - Like the bridegrooms waiting for the bridegroom lamps running low on oil, like the owner of the house on the watch for a thief
    - We do not know how long it will be until the next coming- it will take us by surprise
    - So keep alert, stay in the game, do a little self care, but re-engage

- Don't miss a chance to participate in what God is doing around you
- The other typical response is to busy ourselves to make the time go faster
  - On a road trip, it is the board games, or the car bingo
  - During 2020, it may be eating, drinking, Netflix bingeing, or lashing out on social media and email, under and over functioning
    - Or any number of other coping strategies
  - It is basically the opposite of the tendency to nod off, but it has the same drawbacks
  - If we are too busy with things that are less important, we will miss something that is very important
  - If we get too busy with our own priorities, we might miss out on something God wants to tell us
  - This one is mine- I wrote about it in a Sword article not too long ago, the numbness of being busy
  - Being distractedly busy can be just as harmful as sleeping through it all
- Waiting can do odd things to us- like kids on a road trip we do not understand why it is taking so long
  - We find ways of avoiding the discomfort of the wait
  - And for Advent, I think we want to avoid the discomfort of things not being as they should be
  - I recently ran across a post on social media- some of those are good at least
    - It acknowledged that if we are practicing Advent, then we must bear witness to all of the wrongs in the world, all of the pain, all of the injustice
    - And then continue to have faith that God is working out an amazing plan in the midst of everything that is wrong
  - And then the next part of Advent, another part we might try and avoid, is that small voice from God asking us to do something about it
    - To participate alongside of God in that work that God is doing
  - And we get a chance to learn something about God: that God's timing is very different from our own
  - As our New Testament passage describes, "one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day"
  - Or as one writer observed, "God is frustratingly subtle" <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://processandfaith.org/resources/lectionary-commentary/yearb/2011-11-27/first-sunday-advent>

- Things are still incomplete, unfinished, because God chooses to act in a way that is very foreign to us
- Instead of forcing us to do it right, instead of forcing God's will upon us, God invites us
- In fact, God waits on us.
- God's on Advent time of waiting on humanity to figure out that love really is the way.
- The waiting of both the historical Advent and the Advent to come can give us a better understanding of God's own long-suffering
- As we wait this year once again for the Christ child to come, and also for God to ultimately have the victory
  - Advent is a time for neither slumber nor distraction; apathy nor numbness
  - It is a time for intentionality. Of pacing. Of breathing.
  - And of bearing witness to God's work in the brokenness in the world.
  - A chance to look for Christ's coming in the people and events around us day by day as we wait for the big one
  - Waiting is a little uncomfortable sometimes, and we get impatient, tired, and even manic
  - But here is our chance to lean into the discomfort, dig deep
  - Find a middle ground between apathy and distraction
  - We can learn something from waiting:
  - We can learn about patience, endurance, and God's long-suffering
  - And we can also learn about how to better live with ambiguity and paradox
  - We can learn to be more authentic.
  - To say with certainty that "God will come, I just know it!"
  - And then to say quietly to ourselves, "any time now God."
  - 
  - "Are we there yet?"

Amen.