

First Sunday in Advent, 2020

**Isaiah 63:16B-17, 19B; 64:2-7; Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; I Corinthians 1:3-9;
Mark 13:33-37**

Waiting is rarely easy and most often filled with questions. “Are we there yet?” “How much longer?” These questions are common on the lips of children, especially on long travel days. Yet, these questions and other similar ones, are spoken or at least thought by most adults also. Whether we are waiting for a Dr. appointment, the stop light to turn green, the grocery line to move, or our computer to reboot, we have a difficult time waiting. COVID-19 has made our struggle with waiting all the more real. “Are we there yet with a vaccine?” “How much longer?” Even when we wait for good and exciting events, such as the birth of a child, upcoming travel, or a deer hunt, waiting can still be a challenge. Sometimes we get so excited in our waiting we can hardly sleep.

As Gods’ people, we are people who wait. We are people who are waiting the culmination of God’s will and purposes when Christ will come back and make all things new. We are people who are waiting for Jesus to return in all His glory.

Waiting is nothing new. The Old Testament is filled with stories of people waiting for God to act, waiting for prophecies to be fulfilled. In our Old Testament reading from Isaiah, we hear the words, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down.” Isaiah speaks of the longing for a sign to help in our waiting. Moreover, most of the New Testament letters are related in some way to the reality of waiting.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the Church’s liturgical year. Advent means, “coming” or “arriving”. In Advent we intentionally prepare our hearts and lives not only for the celebration of the birth of Jesus (his first coming), but even more, Advent calls us to prepare ourselves for Jesus’ second coming, His glorious return.

In our second reading this morning, Paul reminds the people of Corinth that due to the grace of God given to them in Jesus Christ, they were not lacking in any Spiritual gift as they “waited” for the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Even while Jesus was teaching his disciples, he made it clear that waiting was going to be a reality for his followers. In our Gospel reading from Mark Jesus concludes his teaching with the word “WATCH”. In addition, Before telling the story of the man who left his home and placed his servants in charge, not knowing when the master would return, Jesus prefaces his story with the words, “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.”

Again, we are all too familiar with the realities and challenges of waiting. The question is, are we waiting well? Do we live “watchful” and “alert”? Jesus’ words ring in my ears, “What I say to you, I say to all, “WATCH!”

Using the word “WATCH” as an acronym, I want to suggest 5 words that can help us wait well: **W**onder, **A**ware, **T**hankful, **C**hrist-Centered, **H**ope.

WONDER: It may seem strange that I start with the word “Wonder”. However, after watching my wife live and teach for many years, especially teaching the Catechism of the Good Shepherd, I am becoming more and more convinced that what my wife says is true, “Wonder may be the most important spiritual activity of our lives.”

According to Websters, Wonder is a “rapt attention or astonishment at something awesomely mysterious or new to one's experience.”

Wonder is often associated with children. As we grow, we tend to lose or forget the gift of wonder. God is “Awesomely mysterious” and we are invited to wonder about God. We are invited to wonder about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity. We are invited to sit in awe and wonder.

We are invited to wonder about the world and the craziness of this time. We are invited to wonder about the meaning of life, love, friendship, and God’s Word. We are invited to wonder about our very lives and every breath we take.

To wait well is to wait in wonder. We don’t have to figure everything out. Instead, we are invited, like children naturally do, to simply wonder. To wait well is to wonder at the mystery that God’s mercies are new every morning. To wait well is to sit in the newness of God’s love and wonder.

AWARE: To be Aware is to wait in the present moment. It is to be alive and awake to what is right before us. It is to live in the reality of this moment. The Greek word used for “Watch” can also mean “Stay Awake.” Too often we sleepwalk through life. In our distractions, worries and preoccupations we tend to live only partially aware. Too often we live more asleep than awake to life and to God.

The more we live aware, the more we will be present to God, to others and to our true self. To wait well is to live in the awareness of God’s love and constant presence. We are called to live our lives aware and awake to God’s beauty, truth, goodness and love even in the midst of our struggles, pains and questions.

I know too often I am sleepwalking in life. Advent calls me to wake up and live Aware.

THANKFUL: Thursday was Thanksgiving. While I imagine it was a different kind of Thanksgiving than you have ever had before, I pray you still had a wonderful day. Even with COVID, Thanksgiving offered us a time to reflect on all that we have to be thankful for. As children of God and followers of Jesus, we are called to be thankful people. Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians in today’s reading saying, “I give thanks to my God always on your account...” Living a life of thankfulness is living a life of gratitude. To wait well is it to live in a spirit of thankfulness.

Eucharist means “Thanksgiving”. To wait well is to be Eucharistic people.

CHRIST-CENTERED: To wait well is to wait in relationship with Jesus Christ. To live our lives in such connection with Jesus that our relationship with Him affects everything we do, every conversation we have, every decision we make, every relationship we have. The apostle Paul says in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ.” St. Paul lived his life centered on Jesus.

To live a Christ-centered life is to embrace the Gospel and to live an “encountered” life. We are all called to a personal encounter with Jesus. Not a one-time encounter, but an ongoing, life forming, personal encounter. In his book, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis writes, “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day.”

In Jesus' short story told in our Gospel reading he says, "It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work." Each of us has our own work to do while we wait for Jesus' return. Our primary work, is to fall in love with Jesus, embracing God's gift of faith. Our work is to believe that Jesus is the Christ and to live every moment with, in, through and for Him. To live in Christ is to live in love as Jesus is the personification of true, eternal and unconditional love.

HOPE: As God's beloved children, we are called to wait in the joyful hope of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, Redeemer, and friend. We are promised in God's word that Christ will come back, and what a glorious return it will be.

The Scriptures are clear, no one knows when Christ will return. While there are some who try to look for signs and others who believe the end times are near, we are called to be ready. We are called to wait well. Hope is an essential ingredient. In our joys and sorrows yet unknown, we are called to wait in hope.

Eugene Land drastically changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Lang was asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. This self-made millionaire contemplated what he could possibly say to inspire the students, most of whom would drop-out of school. He wondered how he could get the predominantly Black and Puerto Rican children even to look at him. Scrapping his notes, he decided to speak to them from his heart. "Stay in school", he admonished, "and I will help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of those students changed. For the first time they had hope. One student said, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school.

Hope makes a difference. Are we awake to hope? Are we waiting in joyful hope for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ?

Our world is desperate for true hope. St. Paul wrote these compelling words, "In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that is within you." (I Peter 3:15).

I pray you know the hope that is within you. To wait well is to wait in hope.

“Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert!...What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’”

“Are we there yet?” “How much longer?” We are not there yet and I do not know how much longer, but I do know that we are called to watch and wait well.

In this season of Advent and throughout our lives, may we take seriously Jesus’ call to “Watch”! (To live in **W**onder, to live **A**ware, to be **T**hankful, to live **C**hrist-centered, and to embrace our true and eternal **H**ope).

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Deacon Steve