

November 29, 2020 Sermon: “What Are We Waiting For?” Part I (*Advent*)

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Scripture: Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3

*I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the soil makes the sprout come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.
For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem’s sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.
The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.
You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD’s hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*

Introduction:

This Sunday marks the beginning of Advent, which comes from the Latin word *adventus* – meaning to wait in expectation.

But what does it mean for us to wait today, and what are we waiting for? This week we started our online study of “Unwrapping the names of Jesus”. For anyone who would like to join, you still can. The link, the e-book and audio book are available online.

Advent is a church tradition that goes back to the 6th century AD. As Christianity began to spread into Europe, certain European traditions merged with teachings of the church. In the early church many symbols came from Judaism, but as Christianity expanded to other cultures, new symbols were introduced to Christianity. The tradition of the evergreens is one of them. It symbolizes everlasting life as the only tree that remains green in winter. In a similar way, December 25th became the date we celebrate Jesus’ birth because of the winter equinox, when the days become longer symbolizing the return of the light to the world. These traditions were

already part cultures other than Judaism and became traditions through which the message of Jesus could be taught.

Because only those who were Jewish had experienced the anticipation of waiting for the coming of the Messiah, as Christianity spread, the season of Advent was introduced so that others could experience the anticipation of waiting for the Messiah. Those who waited rejoiced at the coming of the Christ. There is joy that comes at the end of waiting in anticipation. So, Advent was introduced as a season of waiting in anticipation; the joy comes from the expected anticipation.

Part one: The joy that comes from anticipation

Consider for a moment what it feels like to finally receive confirmation of an anticipated event. Maybe it was the birth of a child, grandchild, or sibling; the joyous moment for the family that happened after nine months of expecting. Or maybe it was waiting for the person you married to come into your life. You knew that person was out there, but you had to wait to find the person. Or maybe it was waiting for a job offer, and once you got the official notice you shared it with all your friends. Or maybe it was retirement and when the day came your friends and family all threw you a big party. Because there is anticipation in expecting, it adds to the joy and excitement when it final comes. Good things come to those who wait.

Imagine growing up in a culture that for centuries had waited for the birth of a Messiah, someone clothed in garments of salvation and robes of righteousness, because that person was chosen by God to be a light unto all the world. This person would be anointed by God to be both priest and king. Prophets proclaimed that such a righteous leader would come and restore peace to the world. Every nation would see the glory of the God shown through him. He would be a royal diadem and have a crown of splendor. And because God revealed this revelation to prophets for centuries, the anticipation and expectation grew and grew for this Messiah to come.

When Jesus was born it says shepherds left their flocks to go and see this child born in Bethlehem. It would be an extraordinary thing if they abandoned their flocks. The arrival of the Messiah was a miracle worth leaving their fields to go and see. No shepherd would ever leave their flock for anything less than a true miracle. The anticipation and expectation drove the excitement of Jesus' birth.

Part two: The one worth waiting for

Several years ago, I was coming home from deployment. My children had not seen me for six months. Carolyn had created a calendar to count down the days until Dad would return. Every day they took turns putting a sticker on the calendar to count the days until I was expected to come home. When the day came, they went to the airport and waited for me to come down the stairs from the terminal. They only had to wait for six months, but we were all crying when I got to the bottom of the escalator.

Perhaps you have had an experience like that. Many of you probably remember before cell phones, waiting for the arrival of friends or family to come to the house. Maybe they arrived late, but when they got there the doors flew open and everyone rejoiced at their arrival.

Unfortunately, today we live in a society focused on instant gratification and have lost some of the wonder of being surprised by the unexpected. There is joy that comes from anticipation.

How many months have we been waiting for the vaccine to arrive? Once it is given and proven to be effective there will be a lot of celebrating as we hope our lives will return to something normal again. The right thing is often worth waiting for.

For centuries, the Hebrew people waited for the Messiah, the right leader to come and fulfill the promise made by God of one whose throne would endure forever and ever. A leader that would bring people together and establish justice for all. A person through whom the glory of God could be revealed to all the nations of the earth. This Messiah would be the one worth waiting for.

Part 3: What are we waiting for?

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. It is a season of waiting and expectation. This morning we light the candle of hope. It is a reminder that even in the most difficult times God is our source of hope.

Hope helps us to see that the future will be better than what it is in the moment. Hope sustains us in the difficult moments of life. Hope reminds us to wait just a little longer because help is coming. Hope helps us to wait while we are anticipating something better to come.

What do we hope for? What are we waiting for? What are we looking to as that better future ahead? I titled this sermon series “What are we waiting for?”. The Hebrew people had prophets that helped them to understand what was worth waiting for. They were waiting for the Messiah to come and deliver them. That is what the passage in Isaiah this morning is speaking about. Isaiah gave them the revelation of the one to come who would restore the people of God to be a nation known because all would see the glory of their God through this Messiah to come.

What are we waiting for? My hope is for my children to have a future. I pray that Jesus will be present in their lives to help them navigate through all the challenges they will face in life. My hope is that all children will be able to learn who Jesus is and have a relationship with God through the example of Jesus. When my children pray, I want them to know God hears their prayers and answers them. Because of Jesus, sin is no longer a boundary that separates us from God. Because God hears our prayers there is hope. I am waiting for their lives to be touched in the way God touched my life when I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

It is worth asking the question, *what are we waiting for?* What is the hope we look to God to find? Do we know what we are waiting for is similar to what the Hebrew people waited in anticipation of?

Conclusion:

Christmas will be here soon. It is fun to decorate and prepare for the traditions we have with Christmas. This year I imagine Christmas will be a little different for all of us. It will not be the same old same old Christmas. Some of us might not be looking forward to Christmas this year because it will be different. I really hope that is not the case.

The reason we celebrate Christmas is because of a man two thousand years ago named Jesus who is the one that was worth waiting for. My hope is that the world would be filled with more people like Jesus who are kind and compassionate. My fear is that there will be greed and corruption like there has always been that rob people of hope and joy.

I think we all expect things. I think the whole world right now is in a period of waiting and expectation. We are waiting for good news. We are waiting for deliverance. We are waiting for people to step up and do the right thing. We are waiting for peace on Earth. When we find Jesus, we find hope that transcends the things of this world. It is only by the grace of God that we can receive eternal life and the promise of the kingdom of heaven. Some things are worth waiting for.

Amen.