

December 2, 2018
Luke 21:25-36

First Sunday in Advent
Vicar Jonah Bruce

“Hope Amidst our Waiting”

May the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you all.

As you might already be aware, I am not originally from Ontario. I come from an extremely small community in New Brunswick. Being away from home, I periodically receive updates from friends and family; or, as they like to put it, I “get the gossip.” Of course, coming from a small town, I can get caught up on the entire community’s business in about 15-20 minutes. These updates tend to include just about anything, and I mean anything. To give you a few examples: two weeks ago, I heard that the Greene’s had left for Florida, that Kelly, the store clerk, wore the same color two days in a row, and of course, that my neighbor three doors down, got pulled over for speeding but got off with it because his wife went to school with the police officer’s sister’s husband.

You never quite know what that local gossip is going to be and now that I am somewhat distanced from the community, I tend to find these updates to be quite humorous because as the saying goes: everyone is truly famous in a small town. If you’ve ever lived in a rural location, you probably know exactly what I mean.

Sadly, when I received the most recent note from home, there was no laughter. This week’s letter seemed to lack its usual gossip and excitement. It didn’t focus on the color of the store clerk’s shirt or on who got pulled over and why. Instead, it had a tone of sadness and uncertainty as it explained the sad reality facing many of the people within my home community. It seems that so many of my family and friends are now stuck in moments of waiting. The note informed me that my former Pastor spent the week waiting in the hospital with his father who is not expected to make it. Likewise, dear friends of mine are waiting on cataract surgery and my former Sunday school teacher has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease, so now she and her family have embarked upon a journey of waiting for it to take its course.

Waiting can be such a difficult journey and if I can be honest with you, I detest waiting. I detest the uncertainty of not knowing. I get anxious and worried when circumstances outside of my control leave me waiting. But, waiting seems to be a somewhat reoccurring aspect of life and I am uncertain if any of us are exempt from the journey of waiting. Within our own congregation, there are many who, like the people in my hometown, are waiting. Waiting on test results, waiting on appointment dates, and waiting to hear from those we love. People are waiting on so many different things.

Of course, we also have now entered the month of December, which is famous for being a month filled with anticipation and waiting. Many young children excitedly anticipate the coming of Santa and that magical moment when they can finally open their gifts on Christmas morning. Likewise, many families anticipate a time of togetherness when relatives, both from near and far, embrace one another in countless different ways. Of course, there are also those who eagerly wait for the holiday season to pass.

Waiting appears to be such a prominent feature of this life.

In fact, a study from the Timex Institute reveals that North Americans spend a huge majority of their time waiting. Perhaps some of us can relate with their findings? They note that on average, people spend:

6 months of their lives waiting in line

43 days of their lives on hold with customer service representatives

38-50 hours per year waiting in traffic
32 minutes per visit waiting to see the doctor
and 21 minutes per week waiting on a significant other to get ready

In many situations of course, these wait times tend to feel significantly longer and despite what the media says about this being a “now generation” where technology supposedly generates instantaneous results, so much time is spent waiting.

Likewise, in today’s gospel text, and as we begin the season of Advent, we are once again introduced to the theme of waiting. Advent is a time in which we wait for the promised Messiah and wrestle with the concept of a Christ who is both here and yet to come. Yes, Advent is a time of waiting and of preparing to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, but it is also a time of waiting for what the early Christians referred to as the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ.

That is where today’s gospel text picks up. Amidst the imagery of stars, and moon, and sun, Jesus is offering the sure promise of his return with power and great glory...but alas, Christ makes it clear that this promise will not be fully fulfilled without a duration of waiting. So, here we are: waiting. Waiting with uncertainty about the day, time, or year when Christ will return.

That being said however, there are many people who think they can calculate when that day will come. You might recall the Cuban missile crisis, the Y2K electronic calendar roll over, or Ronald Weinland who is now “readjusting” his calculations after being wrong the first four times. Despite what these people and circumstances might suggest, the Bible tells us that no person knows when the predicted second coming will occur. The gospel of Matthew describes the return of Christ as a thief coming in the night and stresses that the *parousia*, the second coming, will be “at an unexpected hour” (Matthew 24:44).

We do not know when Christ will return, just as we often do not know when our particular moments of waiting will end and if you are anything like me, you might find that it is easy to get caught up in that uncertainty. It is easy to get caught in the worry and anxiety of not knowing and that can sometimes seem paralyzing and feel like a burden that is too heavy or too difficult to carry.

But, we need not carry it alone because we do not walk our journey alone. God, who is full of grace and compassion, promises to be with us - always. And as we will be reminded in the coming weeks as we celebrate the birth of the promised Savior, we serve a God who always keeps His promises.

That’s the beauty of Advent; that is the message of grace that is layered within today’s gospel text. Christ is reminding us that despite our uncertainty, despite our waiting amidst so many different circumstances, we have a sure and certain hope in the promise of Christ; because we serve a good and faithful God, we have hope and that is why Advent is a celebration. We symbolically prepare and wait for the birth of Emmanuel, but being a people of this time and place, we already know how that narrative goes. We have already benefited from the gift of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection and for that we can celebrate and wait with a certainty of hope for Christ’s grand reappearance.

Advent comes during a season when daylight is the shortest and that is a beautifully symbolic thing. It symbolizes that even when the situations of life seem to be at their darkest, there is light and there is hope, because of the promises of God that are fulfilled through the gift of Jesus Christ. When the darkness of uncertainty and the fear and anxiety of waiting invade our journey of life, we need not fear because the light of hope, who is Christ our Lord, walks with us – even in the darkest moments. That is why there is

reason to celebrate! It's not because we are exempt from uncertainty and waiting, but because we have hope in and through the gift of who Jesus is and who he promises to be: the Light of the World, a friend who sticks closer than a sibling, the blessed hope in which we trust.

God's faithfulness and love know no bounds. God is with the people of my hometown, mourning and waiting alongside of them and God is with us in our places of here and now, just as that same God is with all people despite race, language, or economic status. Advent is about the message of hope that is present in the narrative of Jesus Christ – a message that is worth sharing with people of every time and place

God loves us and walks with us as we navigate life's journey of waiting. Although there might be uncertainty about the circumstances of this life, through faith there is hope and certainty in the promises of God. We are not alone in the waiting – God walks with us and there is hope for both this life and in life hereafter.

Emmanuel is with us and Emmanuel will come again. Amen.