

## **“Stay Awake: Watch and Wait!”**

Date: November 29, 2020

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

Occasion: Advent 1, Year B

Theme: Waiting;

It's hard for many of us to understand Jesus' delay in his coming. God's time clock is certainly out of sync with our own, as Little Jimmy learned one day. He was laying on a hill in the middle of a meadow on a warm spring day. Puffy white clouds rolled by and he pondered their shape

Soon, he began to think about God. “God, are you really there?” Jimmy said out loud. To his astonishment, a voice came from the clouds.

“Yes, Jimmy. What can I do for you?”

Surprised, but not wanting to miss an opportunity, Little Jimmy decided to ask God a question. “God, what is a million years like to you?” Knowing that Jimmy could not understand the concept of infinity, God responded in a manner to which Jimmy could relate. “A million years to me, Jimmy, is like a minute.”

“Oh,” said Jimmy. “Well then, what's a million dollars like to you?” “A million dollars is like a penny to me,” said God. “Wow!” said Jimmy. Then he gets an idea. “God, you're so generous, can I have one of your pennies?”

God replied, “Sure thing, Jimmy; just a minute.”

Well, Little Jimmy wasn't ready for that answer. Waiting is hard, isn't it? Here we are on the first Sunday of Advent, the season of waiting. It is a time of anticipation. Little children await the arrival of Santa Claus. We all wait to receive the vaccine for the Covid virus and a time when we can return to our normal way of doing things.

We wait; we expect; we anticipate. Waiting is a vital part of the Christian life. Daily we wait for God's Spirit to direct us, to show us the way. We wait to hear a word from the Lord. We wait for Christ to return. Waiting is not easy. It takes discipline; it takes practice, and it takes patience.

The gospel lesson for this first Sunday of Advent is one of a few places where Jesus foretells his Second Coming. He gave us signs and wonders to look for, and for centuries Christians have been waiting.

Generally, Christians fall into two camps – those who try to predict when Jesus will return, and those who dismiss his return all together. Both of those extremes are wrong. We are not meant to know the exact day or hour of Christ's return. There are some who think that the signs are present that He could be coming soon in our own lifetime. But we are not meant to know the day or the hour; it simply isn't for us to know.

On the other hand, we are told by Jesus, quite explicitly, that we should watch and be ready. It's similar to those who live near the coast who have been given a warning that a hurricane is coming their way. They know they had better get ready. The terrible storm of destruction may arrive sooner or it may come later. But when it comes, they had better be ready.

Or consider the situation of the British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, who on an expedition to the South Pole, had to leave behind a few men on Elephant Island, promising that he would return. Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through.

His men, ready and waiting, quickly scrambled aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them. Contemplating their narrow escape, the explorer said to his men, "It was fortunate that you were all packed and ready to go!"

They replied, “We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, “He may come today.” May we, as Christians, be as faithful and ready in our waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the ages, people have longed for the coming of a Savior. Isaiah wrote, “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down.” (64:1) For centuries, the Israelites longed for a Savior.

The light of the first Advent candle calls us to make our homes, our churches, and our hearts ready for the coming of the Savior. On this first Sunday of Advent, we not only prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birth at Christmas, but we remember the hope of the early Christians. And together with them, we look forward to the day when Christ will come in final victory.

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory... But about that day or hour no one knows.... What I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (Mark 13:26, 32, 37)

Well, during Advent, the watching and waiting that we do is an inward and spiritual experience. So, let’s talk about a few of the ways that you can prepare yourself for the birth of our long-awaited Savior.

First, let’s use Advent to examine ourselves and see if there is anything that stands between us and the Lord, and then, let us confess it. The passage from Isaiah 64 reminds us that we are sinners. It also tells us that God holy, that God hates sin. Psalm 64 also affirms that God can restore the sinner and God can renew the relationship with his people.

During Advent, let us be thorough in our self-examination, asking God to show us more of sin, that we may confess it and be done with it. The spiritual preparation Christians need to do is become aware of their need for a Savior. It is Christ who through his death on the cross cancels our sin.

Second suggestion: Advent can help us prepare to celebrate an alternative festival, a truly Christian Christmas, in our churches and in our homes. In a culture that has coopted the true meaning of the holiday, let us reclaim it. May we find ways of expressing the heart of the gospel – thinking more of others than we do ourselves.

Consider alternative gift buying. Instead of spending so much on yourself or your family, consider ways of helping those less fortunate. Since we are discouraged from large gatherings, instead of holiday parties, let's use the time for devotional reading, prayer and contemplation. Instead of merely tossing out a cliché, "Keep Christ in Christmas," let's look for ways to make him the central part of our celebrating.

Third and final suggestion, let's look for the presence of Jesus among us right now. Christ has already come once, so let us look for his presence among us and within us, here and now. Jesus is everywhere for those who have eyes to see Him.

See Him in the extra expressions of courtesy and kindness among some of your fellow shoppers. See Him in the look of the homeless person seeking shelter or food. See Him in the smiles of little children opening their gifts. See Him in the faces of bell-ringers seeking donations, or soup-kitchen servers passing out boxed meals.

See Him in the face of a prodigal son or daughter who calls, emails or shows up at the door, asking if they can come home. And when you look in the mirror, don't be surprised if you see the sparkle of His Spirit looking back at you.

Many people say they wish we could have the Christmas spirit all year long. Could it be that whether people name Jesus or not, at this time of year people of all faith traditions and no faith, still practice the message?

He taught and brought into the world, the message of love? Let us look for Jesus in the faces of all we meet, and thus may we have the spirit of Christmas all year long.

Stay awake: watch and wait. Christ has come. Christ is here. Christ will come again.

Jesus came as a baby born in Bethlehem, destined to be the Messiah promised by prophets and announced by John the Baptizer.

Jesus comes into our lives today, as we share the Gospel, share His Supper, share his word of forgiveness, and share in the fellowship of the baptized in His Church.

Jesus will come again to “make all things new and judge the world in righteousness.”

Let us watch, and be ready. Amen!