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Advent 1 A – Nov. 27, 2022

“Get Ready, Get Set ... Wait!”

Read: Matthew 24: 36 - 44/ Memorize: Matthew 24: 36

It’s probably not a surprise to you that today is Advent. After all, it’s almost Christmas time. You’ve eaten your turkey and once done, you know Christmas isn’t very far away. Now, if you’ve been in the church a while you know that Advent isn’t the preparation for Christmas. It is a time of great expectation and anticipation. The question is, what is it that we anticipate? What are we supposed to be getting ready for? And what do we expect to happen?

Some would tell you that you should expect the world to end. That voice often gets louder near the end of a year among some religious groups. Some mistakenly think they are preparing for the coming of the Christ child, again?

As I’m sure you know, some are preparing for that long month of shopping, often committing “economic murder” on their bank accounts in their quest for something, while preparing for the traffic jam at Eastview Mall. Maybe you’re anticipating the parties, with all the delectable party foods of the season, ignoring the typical end result of that.

It could be said that we celebrate two separate events on December 25. One is living out the nightmare of Christmas preparation. For many, who faithfully observe the consumer Christmas, Advent is the inevitable prelude of disappointment. They have these fantasies of what Christmas will be like and the reactions to their gifts, which are sometimes disappointing, leading the giver to also be disappointed.

On the other hand, the Advent we celebrate in the church, the one that has nothing at all to do with the number of shopping days left until Xmas, is different. Or should I say we hope it is? The things we do, lighting Advent candles, the placement of poinsettia for Christmas Eve invites us to dream dreams of a better

world, to allow expectant visions that have nothing to do with sugar plum fairies. Advent invites us to fill the cup of today with a full measure of tomorrow.

Where the prophet Isaiah thought about the advent of God, he envisioned a world unified in worship of God and committed to peace. He dreamed of a time when the nations and people of the world would join together in recognizing the sovereignty of God and declare, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that God may teach us His ways and the we might walk in His path." In that world that Isaiah envisioned people lived in peace. The way we see Advent and Christmas will determine our approach to the celebration.

Is the essential work of Advent about hanging decorations or opening our lives to the coming Christ and learning to live in peace? Will Christmas only come if we have done all the right things to get ready for it? Or is Christmas a gift from God that arrives, whether we're ready for it or not?

It's very clear from the Bible that the Advent of God is much more about surprise than predictability, more about revelation than declaration. I'm not suggesting forgoing poinsettias, gifts or a Christmas tree to be true to the season. I'm saying, the message of Advent is not, "Put up the decorations! Here I come!" But "Watch and wait! You must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour that you do not expect Him."

You probably already know this: Jesus will come whether we're ready or not. I have already heard a couple of people say, "I can't believe it's already ..." And you can fill in the blank. That statement kind of assumes that Christmas can come only if we make all the proper preparations.

The reality is that God's entrance into our lives, in the person of Jesus Christ, occurs at God's initiative, not ours. Jesus doesn't come as a reward for getting it all done. He comes as a result of the love and compassion of God. He will come again because of His compassion, rather than our readiness.

Perhaps the lack of a Christmas Gospel or hymn surprises you? Jesus and His disciples are talking about His future return. The disciples are just being very human. They want the inside scoop on that. He uses a story that they would be very familiar to them to clue them in that they're not going to know.

He reminds them that in the time of Noah, people were just living their lives like they lived them every other day. Only Noah had listened to God, built an ark and was prepared when God said to him, "Get in your ark, Noah, the rain's coming." It was truly obedience because no one had ever seen rain before. Noah acted by faith. That's what Jesus is telling the disciples, and us that we also need to do.

We are to live in the light of the return of Jesus. People are going to do what they ordinarily do in this time. Some will be ready because they ordinarily look for Jesus. Some will not be ready because they don't ordinarily look for Jesus. Those folks who have forgotten or disbelieved will be greatly disappointed on that day.

Do you see what Jesus is saying His disciples should concentrate on? Don't spend a lot of time talking about the timing of what is going to be. Jesus was telling them and us that that's the wrong issue. That's the question insiders ask because they think they should have inside information. So what are we to be doing while we're waiting? The important thing for us in Advent is not when Jesus will return, but what the quality of our waiting will be as we wait.

We can only do one or the other. We can concentrate on when Jesus is returning, spending our time channel surfing to find an evangelist who says he knows. Most often what is missing from their pronouncements of coming doom and gloom is a reminder that our focus is not to be on the future, but on the present, on the quality of life we are living today. We can do what Jesus said, "Watch and wait."

Jesus is not calling us to stand around passively while we're waiting. He is urging us to actively live together in a way in this world as Kingdom People, as Advent People. That's serious business that calls for an act of faith. Isaiah echoes that call long before Jesus was on earth: "Oh house of Jacob, come let us walk in the light of the Lord." You cannot be passive if you are walking in God's light!

Advent gives us the more demanding challenge and exciting promise that the present is Kingdom time, too. That Jesus came into flesh, declares that the cup of the present is filled to overflowing with the presence of God. We've just spent six weeks talking about that. To find Jesus in the ordinary, everyday things of life. Both in the good times and in the difficult that God sent His Son to live with us.

If we need any more reminder of that, Matthew describes the gift of the season of Advent with a single word, one of those Christmas words that we should never forget, "Emmanuel," which means God with us.

Jesus is not the God who has been with us; not the God that will be with us, but is Emmanuel, God with us, right now! The message is that each moment has eternal significance. The God of all things, past, present and future is also the God of the here and now. God invites us to live in this present in expectation and awareness of the fact that eternal realities do break in at any moment.

Jesus told us to “keep watch, be on the alert,” that the Kingdom of God is “breaking in.” It’s a very interesting choice of words, isn’t it? All that Jesus said and all He taught has been aimed at helping us understand what the Kingdom of God is like. Those who take seriously the Kingdom of God, as Jesus teaches it, must know clearly and well that our work is not over when we have preached “repent and be saved.” There is much more to the Gospel than that.

Kingdom living is not a simple matter that can be summed up in cliché or pious pronouncement. **Kingdom living is living in the light of the love of God, revealed in Jesus, who came to be with us and is coming again, some day!**

Count me in: How will you reflect the light of Jesus into the places you go and the people you meet?