

Sermon for Sunday, November 30, 2008

First Sunday of Advent

By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson	Isaiah 64:1-9
Psalm	Psalm 80:1-7
Second Lesson	1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Gospel	Mark: 13:24-37

Once again, we find ourselves at a new beginning—once again, we find ourselves in a new Church year with this First Sunday of Advent.

Of course, Advent is all about watching, waiting, and wondering, isn't it? These themes are, I believe difficult for us in this particular time and place.

Watching requires us to take the time to reflect upon the events of our lives and in the world; it's a time to reflect on the past, the present, and the future. Reflection is a valuable part of watching—we can't recognize what we're watching for unless we take the time to truly understand what we're watching for through reflection. Opportunities may be missed, or mishaps may be encountered if we don't take the time needed to see what's coming our way.

Today, there seems little time for such reflection. Life happens too quickly—we react to what's happening in our lives rather than reflecting on certain actions and planning ahead to meet opportunities or prevent disasters. As a result of our frantic pace in life, we no longer watch. We no longer anticipate God's actions in our future because we don't take the time to reflect on God's actions in our past or in our present.

This season of Advent calls us to watch, to take the time necessary to reflect upon God's—and our—past, present, and probable future action, both in our own lives and in the world. If we can anticipate it, we will watch for it, and we'll be less likely to miss it when it comes.

We wait in a world that hates to wait, a world that moves quickly and constantly. Sometimes we may feel that if we don't move quickly and constantly as well that we'll be left behind—we've been trained by fast cars, rapid scenarios on TV, and instant cash from our ATMs. We want it all, and we want it *now*, don't we?

We live in a world of instant gratification—if we pray for something and don't get it right away, we often conclude that our faith is weak or that God isn't listening to us. It rarely occurs to us to wait. Yet, when we wait for something, we build anticipation, we watch for when it might be coming, and we prepare ourselves for its coming. When it comes, we're ready and we're able to value whatever it is that we've been waiting for.

This season of Advent calls all of us to wait, to look for and await the coming of Christ into our lives and into the life of our world.

Wonder; I equate wonder with hope. We watch and wait in hope, yet we may wonder if there's anything to hope for. Sometimes things look bleak; we can get a handle on whatever it is that we need to be wondering about and hoping for. All that we can see is the chaos, the unruliness of a world seemingly going mad. If there is no hope, what do we wonder about then? Why take the time to watch and wait?

Sometimes we reign in our hope, thinking that we're naïve about those things we wonder about. Or, we allow our cynicism of ourselves, others, and the world get in the way of our natural hope and wonderment of God.

This season of Advent calls us to hope for the coming of Christ and to wonder about his presence in the world. This positive hope comes from watching and waiting expectantly. This hope comes from knowing that we already belong to Christ and already live in communion with him and each other. Without this knowledge, we'd dread the revelation of Christ in our world.

The gift of Christ is that, in him, we have been graced; through him, and in communion with him, we will be without reproach at the day of his coming. Through the gift of grace, we know that our wondering and our hoping are not in vain.

So it is that in Advent, and throughout the rest of this new church year, we can watch, wait, and wonder in hope. We can anticipate and prepare for the coming of Christ into our lives, knowing that no matter who we are and what we've done, we've already been accepted by him are we're already in relationship with him. Advent reminds us to take time to watch, to make space for that waiting which is

so crucial to our spiritual journeys, and to look to tomorrow in wonder and in positive hope, living expectantly for the coming of Christ.

May our Advent be blessed by this waiting, wondering, and watching.

Amen.

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