

Sunday November 30, 2025
First Sunday of Advent, Year A

Sermon: “Hurry Up and Wait”

I remember when this reading came up many years ago. I was in my second year at Emmanuel and was taking my homiletics course. That would be the course in which we learned to write and deliver the homily, or sermon. A friend of mine had been assigned this text to preach from and she didn't know where to start. We talked about it for a few minutes and I said, I think that this text gets lost on our generation. We don't wait for the thief we turn on the alarm and go to bed. We talked some more with ideas flying back and forth and when she delivered her sermon, it went something like this. I think this story gets lost on our generation. We don't wait for the thief we turn on the alarm system and go to bed. What we need is a Second Coming alarm; new from K-Tel; only \$49.95, or 5 easy payments of \$9.99. When it senses the immanence of the Lord it raises the alarm, “Jesus is coming! Jesus is coming!” The walls of the chapel rang with laughter. It was also a sermon that our homiletics professor used to teach us the importance of being careful when we use humour, because if not used carefully, it can blow up in your face. Fortunately, this wasn't one of those times.

Advent is a time of waiting. It is a time of waiting for the coming of the Lord. It is a time of waiting, not only for the anniversary of the first arrival of God in time and space, flesh and blood, but for the return of God.

Waiting is something that we find difficult to do, especially in this era of instant gratification. We don't like to wait for anything. We have everything from instant coffee to instant global communications. And I think we are the poorer for it. We don't have time to savour the waiting. We don't have time to imagine what it will be like to have something that we have to wait for. I'm not sure that we even know how to wait.

Does anyone remember the story about the wise and the foolish virgins? What happens? Right, a wedding is about to happen and there is a group of virgins

waiting for the bridegroom, only the bridegroom doesn't arrive on schedule – which was not uncommon at the time. When darkness fell, the virgins lit their lamps and waited. Some of the virgins trimmed the wicks on their lamps so that they burned less fuel. By the time word came that the bridegroom was on his way, the wise virgins still had fuel in their lamps. The foolish virgins had run out of fuel and begged the wise virgins to share the fuel in their lamps with them. The wise virgins knew there was not enough fuel for all and refused to share. The foolish virgins ran off to get more fuel to light their lamps for the arrival of the bridegroom. When the bridegroom arrived, the wise virgins were waiting and the foolish virgins were absent. The bridegroom escorted the wise virgins to the feast. When the foolish virgins returned with their oil, the wise virgins were gone. The foolish virgins filled and lit their lamps and went to the feast, but they were refused entry. The foolish virgins had simply been waiting for the bridegroom, not thinking about a thing, letting their lamps burn brightly. On the other hand, the wise virgins had been preparing for the arrival, which could happen at any time, soon, or not so soon, and had trimmed the wicks of their lamps to preserve the oil so that their lamps would burn longer.

The kind of waiting Jesus is talking about is not the passive kind of waiting that we engage in in the waiting room at the doctor's office, where we flip through a magazine or stare at a spot on the wall, or where we let our lamps burn brightly while we gossip and giggle like the foolish virgins. Jesus is talking about active waiting, or, more accurately, preparing, like when the wise virgins trimmed the wicks of their lamps. Prepare the way of the Lord!

I remember waiting four decades ago; waiting for the birth of my daughter. It was not a passive waiting, watching mindless drivel on tv. It was active waiting; it was preparing. There were birthing classes. There was the purchase of a new home, and a move. In between those two, there was cleaning and painting to do. There was a diaper service to contact to arrange for delivery of clean diapers. There were things to buy, like a car seat and a stroller and a crib and a change table and clothes and..... And there are other similarities in this kind of waiting.

This waiting was done not knowing when the waiting would be over. Sure, I knew it would be about nine months, but about that day and hour no one knew. The exact time and day were impossible to calculate.

This waiting was done not knowing what was coming. Sure, I knew it was a baby, but would it be a girl or a boy. What colour eyes and hair would it have? Would it be healthy? It was waiting for something that would mean the end of an old way of life and the beginning of something new. It would mean the end of life as a young person and the beginning of life as a parent.

Waiting for the arrival of God is something like that. It is waiting for the end of one thing and the start of another. It is waiting for something unknown. It is waiting for some unknown time. It is waiting actively; it is preparing. And even yet, in a way it is not waiting for, it is preparing the way of the Lord.

What is the distinction? We are not preparing “for” the Lord, we are preparing “the way” “of” the Lord. So what is that “way?”

The way of the Lord is the way of love, which is the precursor to justice, which is the precursor to peace, which is the foundation of joy. To prepare the way of the Lord is to love, to work for justice, and peace, with the hope of finding joy. To prepare the way of the Lord is to work at creating hope.

How do we do that? How do we create hope?

Let's back up a bit. There is charity, which, unfortunately is necessary, and there is justice. An example of charity is giving food to the food bank so people can be fed for a day. Great. Necessary. And, then we have to give more food to the food bank so they can eat again tomorrow. An example of justice is working for a livable wage so that people have enough of an income to afford life's necessities and no longer need to depend on the food bank to feed themselves and their families. Which one do you think creates hope? Feeding a person for a day, or giving them what they need to survive over the long term?

So, how do we create hope? Do we even know who in our community is without hope and why? What can we do to create hope for them?

When my first marriage ended, I had a choice. Either I could be housed, or my ex and my daughter could be housed, but my income did not stretch far enough for both. I made the decision to ensure that my daughter was housed. Had it not been for my step-father and mother taking me in, I'd have been homeless. And, I was already somewhat depressed at the time. Had I been homeless, I'd have been severely depressed, to the point of being unable to work – not that I could have worked without a place to shave and shower or store some work clothes. And, if I'd have been severely depressed, alcohol or drugs would have been a natural next step to escape the reality of my situation.

We take a look at the homeless, the addicted, the mentally unwell on our streets and we make all kinds of assumptions. Some of those assumptions may be correct, but I'd be willing to bet that many are incorrect. A pair of clean dry socks are wonderful. There is not much worse than cold wet feet. But clean dry socks don't offer hope for the future. Getting them housed and getting them the supports they need to break an addiction, deal with psychological trauma, deal with mental illness, or whatever else they need help with offers them hope for the future, because when they are homeless and living under an overpass there is no future, there is no hope.

Supporting things like supportive housing creates hope for people, hope for a better tomorrow. When we get involved in projects like that we become agents of hope. And that is the kind of waiting God wants us doing. Not passive, self-indulgent waiting; but active, preparing; showing love – God's love – to the least of these; working for justice and peace; creating hope. So hurry up and wait. May it be so.