

“God’s Promised Day Can’t Wait- Hope Can’t Wait”

Matthew 24: 36-44

Advent I

Part I of VI in the sermon series “What Can’t Wait”

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: Stir up your power and come, Lord Jesus. Come to us in all the moments of our lives. Help us to watch so that we are amazed by your love. Bless us in our Advent journey. Amen.

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It must be Advent. The tree is up. The sanctuary is decorated. The wreaths are hung. The smell of balsam and cinnamon fills the air. The jazzy melodies on the radio, the twinkly lights and those inflatable lawn ornaments are here. The preacher’s voice was attacked by a seasonal virus. It must be Advent.

But wait. The hymns we sing have a different tone, and to be quite honest--the texts we hear, like this one, are weird and a little off-putting. Today’s text rings with apocalyptic words that stand in contradiction to the commercialized season. It really must be Advent.

Our sermon series for Advent follows a theme of “What Can’t Wait!” We are caught up in a season filled with dashing and

dancing, hurrying and scurrying every which way. At the same time we are yearning and waiting for the world to change. We journey together through the season in a way that sets us in a place of contradictions. Where else can you have such a clash of cultures? It is jarring to hear about the Second Coming as we shop for that perfect Christmas sweater while sipping on our grande Peppermint Mocha. Today, God's Promised Day Can't Wait!

Every year on this first Sunday in Advent we hear texts like the one from the Gospel of Matthew. Every year we hear these words that don't seem to have anything to do with getting ready for Christmas. There is no mention of the baby Jesus – nothing about preparing our hearts for mangers and shepherds and kings. Every year we hear about some future time when he is going to return.

In this text, the apocalypse is upon us. The Gospel writer shares that there will be tribulation and the world will see the day of God's vengeance on human sin. The Christian tradition claims that, sooner or later, Jesus is going to come back. At that time it will be scary and wonderful and unlike anything we have seen.

The earliest believers thought that Jesus would return in their lifetime. They had to deal with the reality that Jesus had not come back in the expected timeframe.

The other crisis of the early church was the growing realization that the world didn't change as much as they had hoped it would. When God reveals the power to overcome the grave, breaking the bonds of death and redeeming all humanity- shouldn't that radically change everything?¹

We live in a post resurrection world and yet over two thousand years later we still ask the question, why aren't things better?

Today I'm thinking of our world in crisis. The largest refugee population since World War II, 37,000 forced to flee each day because of conflict or persecution.² I think of the greatest climate threat of our lifetime and the degradation of the planet that will soon be irreversible. I think of 54,000 people in our city that don't have permanent housing. Thousands of Ohio families are victims of the opioid epidemic. Jesus, could you come back now?

I think of three 16-year-old boys who were arrested in Baltimore on Thanksgiving Day 1983 and charged with murder. Alfred Chestnut, Ransom Watkins and Andrew

¹ Description of early church crisis from sermon time with colleague, Rev. Amy Miracle at BSPC.

² <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

Stewart were convicted and sentenced to life in prison. The current Maryland state's attorney asked the Conviction Integrity Unit to reexamine the case as a wrongful conviction. The three, now in their 50s, were all released from prison on this past Monday — fully exonerated after spending 36 years incarcerated for a murder they didn't commit.³ Thirty-six years! Jesus, where have you been all this time?

There is a secular counterpart to this apocalypse. Young children are taught that catchy little tune, “He knows when you are sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good... ..” Santa Claus is keeping track of who is “naughty or nice,” handing out consequences and rewards accordingly. Be ready Christians, Santa Claus and his creepier cousin, Elf on the Shelf, are back in full force this season. Don't be coerced with the popular Christmas songs. While upbeat in cadence, they deliver messages of dread.

Pop culture gives voice to the prevailing theology of many in churches across America. We don't trust that God's promised grace is real. We don't believe that grace is for us. And so we come to believe and act as if the word of God is not gracious, but vengeful and punishing. Through that lens, there is no way

³ Laura Wamsley, <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/26/782941770/after-36-years-in-prison-for-georgetown-jacket-murder-3-men-are-exonerated-at-la>

that we can see this text as the announcement that we are liberated by God's grace.⁴

So hear the Good News. We are set from by God's grace. Jesus does announce the end of the world. God's Promised Day will come, not with vengeance, but in the form of a helpless baby in a stable in Bethlehem. His life on earth will point to the wondrous works of God in the world and will be the fulfillment of what the prophets foretold. The ultimate defeat will be a helpless man on a cross outside of Jerusalem. The end of the old world of sin and death has come exclusively through God's reconciling mercy.

This passage is does not let us go. It is God's word of promise, a gift to us that we might open ourselves, our eyes, our lives to the incredible, surprising, immeasurable and intimate love of God. God's promised day can't wait. We need that day to come. We need Christ to come to set the world aright.

Like no other time in the year, these next few weeks reveal to us our lonely places. At a time when we are supposed to be with family and friends and we are supposed to enjoy being

⁴ Elizabeth Eaton, Sunday November 27, 2016

https://day1.org/articles/5d9b820ef71918cdf2003fe0/bishop_elizabeth_eaton_advent_liberated_by_gods_grace

with our family and friends, many of us see all too clearly the brokenness and fragility of our relationships.

Advent acknowledges that we are not all fine. Advent makes the claim that things are not the way they are supposed to be.

Our Advent hope is nothing superficial. Advent tells the truth about the brokenness of the world and the pain in our lives. It points us forward with hope for things to be better, for things to be different.

Father Gregory Boyle has a lot to say about Hope. Father Boyle is the Founder of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, the largest gang-intervention, rehab, and reentry program in the world. Father Boyle says, “Hopeful kids don’t join gangs. Gang involvement is about the lethal absence of hope. No kid is seeking anything when he joins a gang, he’s always fleeing something. There are no exceptions.” When Boyle asks a particular young man who is entering the Homeboy program whether his drug test will come back clean, the young man answers, “All I have in my system is hope. I will always test positive for that.”⁵

Advent does more than articulate the truth of the human condition. Advent offers us the opportunity to test positive for hope, because we can’t wait any longer. Whatever chaos,

⁵ Boyle, Gregory. *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship*, 2017.

suffering and cruelty are happening in the world at the moment; whatever pain and heartache or grief you hold this day; history's final outcome remains in God's hands.

Advent acknowledges that we don't do any of this on our own. We will only get so far--and we need God. God offers this hope even as our weary world still waits to rejoice.

Our Advent hope lies in the truth that we are loved and claimed by God before we even begin. In that is a promise that all things will be made new.

Come, Lord Jesus, Come. Your Promised Day Can't Wait.

Amen.

12.1.19 ADVENT 1A

Matthew 24:36-44

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew Chapter 24.

³⁶“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

The Word of God for the People of God.

Thanks Be to God.

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