

With Us While We Wait – Part One: Watch

Mark 13; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7

December 3, 2023

By Pastor David Fields

“... You're here in the center of all hopelessness
When little of our faith is left
You're lifting up our weary heads
You're here in the tension of the life that was
The here and now, the yet to come
And through it all Your promise stands

That you're with us while we wait...”

- **'While We Wait', Amanda Cook**

I. Promise: Watching in Hope

Mark 13:32-37

All the references to the return of the master happen over the phases of a night: evening, midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn. Why?

All through the New Testament the writers speak of this “present age” as one of darkness – and they mean that in the sense of a time when evil is still very much present; when God’s enemy, and the forces of evil are still actively functioning.

Longing for the coming of Jesus – watching and waiting and working at our assigned tasks – it will be done in a world that is still dark, in the face of evil and our enemy, Satan.

“Jesus...deliberately gives no information helpful for fixing any date. Yet false prophets continue to arise and reduce Christianity to simplistic answers.... The [false prophets] capitalize on our craving to escape...the painful paradoxes and tensions and indirectness of faith into the comfortable security of sight.

When the Son of Man comes, He will not quiz people to see whose predictions on the date were accurate. He will want to know what we were doing. Were we proclaiming the gospel to all the nations? Were we enduring suffering faithfully?

Were we fulfilling the assigned tasks?

Those who have been asleep [meaning, not doing our assigned task] or buried in the task of trying to map out the times rather than carrying out the mission will be more than embarrassed; they will be judged. This is why Jesus warns His disciples to be on their guard (13:9).” – David Garland, *Mark*

II. Purpose: Watching as Active and Passive

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

What does it look like to watch?

1. **Watching is located *in* and fueled *by* God's grace.**
2. **Watching is using our God-given gifts to work at our assigned task.**

Are you using your gifts for His glory and the good of the church family and world? Our pastoral team can help you find the right fit for serving.

3. **Watching is eagerly expecting the "revealing" of Jesus.**

We can't "make" the Kingdom come or King Jesus return. The timing is utterly and totally of God's own choosing.

So, we wait in eager hope: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!" – Isaiah 64:1

Practices in the Waiting:

Maybe your advent practice starts with *asking God to help you see the world the way He does*. To give you "eyes" of compassion. To pray, as you look into the pain of the world: "Our Father...Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as in heaven." And then to ask what part of your "assignment" might be addressing that.

Maybe it's to be a little less worried about getting "presents" for everyone who might be expecting them, and just be **more "present"** to those God has put in your life? To give yourself, and your presence, to them in care.

Maybe *that* looks like asking your neighbour or co-worker, "How are you? How are you *really*?" And then you prepare to listen, like really listen. There is a ministry of "presence" – of making yourself available through time, and emotional energy to show the love of God to someone in need.

4. **Watching recognizes God is the Main Actor – the Subject.**

"He [that is, God] will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." – 1 Corinthians 1:8-9.

Who will keep you firm till the end? *Who* empowers us to live out this hope? God will. The one who "called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord," that God is faithful.

5. Watching is in “fellowship with His Son”

Isn't that the heart of it all? The Gospel itself? That we are forever joined to Jesus, through what he's done? We are longing for Jesus to return, because we are longing to be with the one who has loved us, who gave Himself for us.

III. Posture: Watching as an act of Loving Longing

It's true: Jesus is “with us.” We do have “fellowship” with Him right now that is sweet and true. But we are longing for that unmediated closeness. Why? Because of love.

Paul ends his letter to the Corinthians with this Aramaic phrase: “*Mara na tha*” – which means “Lord, please come!”

As we look at the injustice, the evil, the pain of our world, we can echo that same longing today – to keep our eyes fixed on the horizon. This doesn't mean disengagement from the world, but a commitment to doing what God has called us to, with the gifts He has given us, to participate in the healing of the world; through words and works of hope.

Words of hope: announcing the gospel news that the King *has come*. God does love us. *He has died and risen to give us forgiveness, and life – real life – now and forevermore.*

Work that aligns with and flows from that hope:

- Ringing a bell with the Salvation Army's kettle campaign.
- Preparing a Christmas hamper for a family through Hopewell – there's a link I provided in your bulletin.
- Taking the time to listen to that friend or neighbour.
- Inviting a family to join us for the Night in Bethlehem or one of our Christmas Eve services.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up

Think of a recent time you had to wait. What made it difficult? What did you do to cope?

Dig In

1. Read the following quote and discuss.

“Without waiting, our faith is shallow, escapist, and triumphalistic. Waiting increases our ability to lament, to long for change, to learn all we can, to work in hope. We need these skills and habits to help us become the kind of people who can respond to the challenges in our world in faith, hope, and love.” – Jason Gaboury

- a. Did you ever think of waiting as building skills? As a place for forming us, to make us deeper, more mature, more the kind of people who can live in the face of challenges. Why or why not?
 - b. How has “waiting” and “patience” factored into your own spiritual growth or maturity?
2. Read **Mark 12:32-37**. Jesus is clear that we are to be a people who are “fully awake” to the reality of His return, and to being about the business He has for us.
 - a. How do Jesus’ words here: motivate you, challenge you, and/or comfort you? Share why.
 - b. Jesus speaks of His servants having “assigned tasks.” Do you have a sense of what your task is? How are you doing it? How might you need to reprioritize to best “keep watch”?
 3. Read **1 Corinthians 1:3-9**.
 - a. How does this text encourage you in terms of your “assigned task”?
 - b. Are you eager for Jesus’ return? Why or why not?
 - c. How might you want to deepen that sense of eagerness this Advent?

Prayer

Take some time to pray for those things you just discussed – about your assigned tasks, the gifts you’ve been given, and your desire for Jesus’ coming. Pray for the needs of your group, and for the broader community – that we as a church body would faithfully hold out the hope of the gospel and demonstrate Kingdom values in how we love our neighbours.