

With Us While We Wait – Part Two: Wait

Mark 1:1-5, 2 Peter 3:9-15, Isaiah 40:1-8, Psalm 85:8-13,

December 10, 2023

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How We Wait

Probably more than any other season of the year, Christmas is hyped up with great anticipation accompanied, often, by ridiculous amounts of money being spent on preparations in efforts to make the experience as memorable as possible. But when we take a closer look what this Advent season is truly about, for us it's not as much for celebrating Jesus' first coming but, rather, waiting and preparing for His second coming. Therefore we, as the church, have the opportunity – or more accurately, the calling – to approach this season from a very different perspective – to set the tone for Advent.

In our 'comfortable' lives, we may tend to lose our hunger, our longing for the return of Jesus. We can richly benefit from Advent and the accompanying reminders that, regardless of how smoothly our lives may be running, the world is broken, people are hurting, and God's purpose and plan has not yet been fulfilled. And so, we wait. But how do we wait?

As the church, we are called to align our hearts with the heart of God – to weep with those who weep - and, ultimately, to prioritize – to seek first – the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, His justice.

John the Baptist is the foremost character associated with Advent.¹ His life was devoted to pointing to and preparing the way for Jesus. And he sets the example for how we as the church embrace Advent.

I. While We Wait: Confession and Repentance

Read Mark 1:1-5

What do we see here? What was John's message? Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for Him. This is one way we as the church actively wait for the return of Jesus. We get to prepare the way for the Lord. We get to make straight paths for Him. We get to point to Jesus – in recognition of all that He has already done – and in anticipation of what He is ultimately going to do. We can start with confession and repentance.

Confession can be as simple as an honest conversation with God. Maybe that's exactly what it is. Being honest with ourselves – and being honest with God about ourselves. Being honest about how we may have behaved in a manner that contradicts the way God would want us to behave – or about our disappointment, our anger, our frustration. The truth is, God sees and knows our thoughts and actions anyway – so why not be honest?

And *repentance* is a turning. Turning away from patterns of behaviour that displease God and ultimately hurt us too, and turning towards God in recognition that we need His help.

¹ Fleming Rutledge. Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ. P 276

Confession and Repentance should be a daily part of the Christian life – because we need to stay on God’s page – we need our hearts, our desires, our agenda, in alignment with His heart, His desires, and His agenda. This is how He works in us – when we let Him.

When we surrender our lives completely to God, we experience this.

His *transformation* – in our priorities, as our loves get ordered according to God’s design. And we need this. We need this because we are surrounded by distractions – we see and experience the brokenness that is so prevalent in our world. But we are the church. We have the hope that comes through Jesus’ first coming and we have the hope that He’s coming again – and times of honest confession and repentance helps us remember that and re-center our lives around that hope. Hope that “persists in spite of the clearly recognized facts because it is anchored in something beyond.”²

II. While We Wait: Comfort and Relief

We have the hope of Jesus to share. When we share the message that Jesus is coming back to make things right – to finish what He started - we share hope.

And the world we live in needs hope. Advent is associated with darkness – and darkness can be frightening, overwhelming, depressing, and cause *hopelessness*. But darkness can be combatted with hope that is anchored in something beyond. Hope brings *comfort* and *relief*.

And we, as the church, carry that hope with us. And that informs and transforms the way we respond to all the hurt and sorrow and injustice in our world and within our own circles. With hope, we pray for the hurting and seek out how God would have us participate in bringing comfort and relief.

Read Luke 3:8-14

John the Baptist provides practical answers to the questions he is presented which can help us consider how we might be a part of bringing comfort and relief to people in need that we are aware of.

Read 2 Peter 3:9-15

Is Jesus ever coming back? Those who long for Jesus’ return may cry these words out on a regular basis. But we see here that the Lord’s desire is that no one perish, that everyone come to repentance. It is only in right relationship with Jesus that anyone can truly find comfort and relief.

III. While We Wait: Community and Relationship

Read Isaiah 40:1-5

This is what we have to look forward to. The glory of the Lord will be revealed – and all people will see it *together*.

God is a relational God and we, as the church, are His people – those who reflect His character.

According to studies, only 1/3 of Canadians say that they have a meaningful relationship with their neighbours. We, in this country, seem to struggle with the concept of community. We tend to prefer

² Fleming Rutledge. Advent. P 92.

being insulated and isolated within OUR homes with OUR families enjoying OUR stuff. But we are the church. We are called to be influential and inspiring as we share Jesus' pattern of denying ourselves.

"We are "storied people" because the God that sustains us is a "storied God," whom we come to know only by having our character formed appropriate to God's character."³

Discussion Questions

Open Up

1. What's your attitude towards Christmas? Are you excited? Stressed? Ambivalent?
2. What is your favourite and/or least favourite part(s) of the Christmas season?
3. How has your experience of Christmas changed over the course of your life?

Dig In

1. How is a regular practice of confession and repentance important in preparing the way for Jesus' return?
2. Do you have examples of how this has been meaningful in your relationship with Jesus?
3. What are some practical ways you have experienced comfort and relief being shared? What was the impact?
4. When you read that the Lord is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance, how does that encourage or challenge you?
5. How has church community and relationships been influential in your life?

Pray

Spend time opening up to God – Ask Him to help align your heart with His, your desires with His, that your love be ordered in accordance with His.

Pray for those people you are aware of who are facing really challenging situations and continue to pray for opportunities to provide relief and comfort – meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Pray for opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus with others.

Pray that as we open ourselves up to deeper relational connections that God's character would be richly reflected in us as we prepare for His return.

³ Stanley Hauerwas. CTR.