

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶In those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is what he will be called: The LORD Is Our Righteousness.

1 Thess 3:9-13

⁹How can we thank God enough for you, given all the joy we have because of you before our God? ¹⁰Night and day, we pray more than ever to see all of you in person and to complete whatever you still need for your faith. ¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus guide us on our way back to you. ¹²May the Lord cause you to increase and enrich your love for each other and for everyone in the same way as we also love you. ¹³May the love cause your hearts to be strengthened, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his people. Amen.

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵“There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, there will be dismay among nations in their confusion over the roaring of the sea and surging waves. ²⁶The planets and other heavenly bodies will be shaken, causing people to faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world. ²⁷Then they will see the Human One coming on a cloud with power and great splendor. ²⁸Now when these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your redemption is near.” ²⁹Jesus told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that God's kingdom is near. ³²I assure you that this generation won't pass away until everything has happened. ³³Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will certainly not pass away. ³⁴“Take care that your hearts aren't dulled by drinking parties, drunkenness, and the anxieties of day-to-day life. Don't let that day fall upon you unexpectedly, ³⁵like a trap. It will come upon everyone who lives on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶Stay alert at all times, praying that you are strong enough to escape everything that is about to happen and to stand before the Human One.”

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

What if I told you the wait was worth it? We all wait for something. In line at the bank, or the DMV. For someone to holler the words, "Dinner's ready!" or whisper the phrase, "I do." For a job offer. For the light to turn green. Side note: According to the British Driving Standards agency, an average person spends about five total years of their lives waiting in some kind of line, whether at the grocery store or in traffic. Add this to the times that we wait for news from a doctor about those test results, and the time that we wait for that acceptance letter in the mail, and the rest of the time that we just wait, wait, wait, it seems that waiting makes up much of our lives.

What if I told you the wait was worth it? Well, you might not believe me. Part of the problem with waiting is that, so

often, the wait isn't rewarded, or at least the end to the wait isn't the end that we desire. The painstaking moments in line at the bank reveal that your funds are on hold, or worse yet, the funds that you thought were there are gone. The light finally turns green, but turns red again before you make it through the light. You finally get the news from the doctor, but it is less than inspiring. All too often, waiting seems to lead to disappointment.

What if I told you, even in the face of that, that the wait was worth it? That's what Advent says to a world like ours that continues to so long for peace and instead finds violence. The wait is worth it. That's what Advent says to a nation of Israel who awaited so long for a Messiah, but instead found exile from their land and, upon their return, an eventual Roman occupation. The wait is worth it. With that in mind, the theme for our Advent journey is, "Why We Wait: Hope and Action of Advent." For the next four weeks, we'll

look at the ways that the prophets waited for the Messiah, ways that hope and action may shape our waiting, and that the deliverance of God makes that wait well worth it.

Today, Jeremiah puts before us a theme of anticipation, that kind of purposeful waiting that shapes our lives with hope and inspires action. From Jeremiah, we hear God's covenant to *fulfill the gracious promise made with the people of Israel and Judah, that God will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is just and right in the land, that Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.* With these promises of God, we can anticipate God's deliverance, God's righteousness, God's promise will come to us.

What if I told you that the wait was worth it? Well, Jeremiah could barely believe it. Jeremiah witnessed firsthand the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian invaders. His home city, where David ruled as God's ambassador, where

Solomon built the glorious temple for worship of the Lord, the very core of the Promised Land that God gave to the chosen people. Jeremiah witnessed this place fall into the hands of foreign invaders, who then carried away the treasures of the temple, who carted off Israel's elite to serve in King Nebuchadnezzar's court, who killed and scattered the remaining people from the land and left it desolate. How could Jeremiah believe, in the midst of this catastrophe, that the wait was worth it?

Because Jeremiah anticipates God's faithfulness, even amidst the darkness. Notice that this isn't just a ho hum kind of waiting. This is no disinterested lingering in line at the drive through. There's a purpose in Jeremiah's waiting, anticipating God's purpose for righteousness, for justice, for safety. What shapes Jeremiah's wait is the undying trust that even the deepest darkness won't last, for the light of God's promise will rise once again.

This word, hope, has a lot to do with anticipation, with this kind of purposeful waiting. Hope comes from promise and experience that shape our expectations. We see this in Jesus' parable of the fig tree. We can anticipate deliverance from the cold grip of winter into the warm blessing of summer because, sometimes even amidst snowstorms and icicles, plants begin to bud. Despite the grey days and chilled winds, a sign comes to remind us that we may yet spring into bright days.

Of course, the hard part for Jeremiah is that there's no proverbial buds on the trees. He prophesies from the depth of Jerusalem's winter. In fact, one of the Babylonian acts of war was to uproot the vineyards and cut down the orchards. There were no buds to see, for in Jeremiah's view, there were no plants remaining. The root of Jesse's tree seemed burned up, torn asunder, fruitless.

Here, in the midst of that hopelessness, we can see the origins of Advent in the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah's prophecy of salvation, of God's faithfulness, begins precisely at this moment when faithfulness hardly seems believable, and salvation seems quite literally out of reach. That's why there's so much progression of light and decoration throughout the season. Only one candle on the Advent wreath is lit today. There's more darkness than light, but the light is growing. Though the halls are only sparsely decked, decorations will appear more and more throughout the season. We're a far piece from Christmas still. Though our culture seems determined to claim Christmas starts just after Arbor Day, we as a church admit the need for anticipation, for the knowledge that we must wait on God's deliverance, on God's promise, on God's action. This surely comes, but not on our timeline, and surely with no intent to support our consumer capitalism version of the holiday.

So, in Advent, we as a church rehearse Israel's anticipation, Israel's wait, the one first signaled by Jeremiah's words of hope amidst the fall of Jerusalem. We don't rush to Christmas because we believe there's purpose within this wait, that we're shaped not only by God's work through the birth of Jesus but by God's work amidst the wait for that birth as well. Advent anticipation is the antidote for a culture of immediate gratification. The purpose of our wait is not just our eventual deliverance, but our process of deliverance. This wait is a constant reminder that we're unable to save ourselves, and yet we're fully promised salvation. That we're unable to fix the world, and yet the world is promised redemption. That we're unable to earn God's favor, and yet God's chosen us. This anticipation wells within us the realization that we are not God, and yet God is on the way.

Of course, this doesn't mean we have no responsibilities, no actions to perform or behaviors to develop. Advent is also about habit formation, but that preparation must be undergirded by the realization that our action is always dependent upon God's action, that our behavior relies upon God's gift of life, given first in creation, and once again in our baptism. We see that life on Christmas Eve, in the greatest gift we'll ever receive, Jesus Christ. Our anticipation of that gift both reminds us that we're not God, and also that God calls us to become Christ-like in our behavior.

That's why, beginning today, we're collecting items for the Women's Resource Center of the NRV. This organization assists women and children who are victims of domestic violence and assault, and they're in deep need of particular items to help this season become a bit more cheerful for the people they assist. I invite everyone to take

one of these salmon colored tags and buy some of these needed items while you're out Christmas shopping over the next few weeks. Then, bring it back by the last Sunday in Advent, December 20th. We'll collect those gifts under the tree here in the sanctuary, and deliver them on Christmas week to help remind the women and children at the Women's Resource Center of the NRV that there's reason to hope, that there's an anticipation of deliverance, that God's purpose for them isn't violence or hatred or shame or abandonment, but love and healing and wholeness and community. That they're not alone in this journey, and that their wait is worth it.

So, what if I told you the wait was worth it? In the midst of our Advent wait, we may feel like the disciple crying out for the healing of his son who cries out "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief." We too may cry out, Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. That's a statement of hope, of anticipation, of

purposeful waiting. We believe that God is at work in the midst of the initial darkness, and the small signs of light grow as buds of hope, giving us a sign that our wait is worth it, that there is a purpose in our wait, God's not abandoned us, but is at work in a new way to bring an old promise to fruition. And so, we anticipate God's promise. We wait with purpose on God's purpose, Jesus Christ. And we work to become Christlike ourselves, to prepare the way of the Lord. That's our anticipation – waiting on the purpose of Christ and living out the purpose of Christ. Amen.

This sermon ends with the video, "I Am Present," available through our subscription with The Work of the People. You can preview or download that video at this website, as well as check out the other resources they offer:

<http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/i-am-present>

Why We Wait: Hopes and Behaviors of Advent

Weekly Themes

Week 1 – Anticipation (Waiting with Purpose – Jeremiah 33)

Week 2 – Transformation (Anticipating Change – Malachi 3)

Week 3 – Restoration (Transformation to God's Purposes – Zephaniah 3)

Week 4 – Redemption (Restoration to Value – Micah 5)