

## Actively Waiting

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (Series C. 1 Sunday in Advent) Ps. 25:1-10

Luke 21:21-36

*Then the Son of Man will appear, coming in a cloud with great power and glory. When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your salvation is near.*

Prayer:

Happy New Year! That is, a New Church Year. The four-week liturgical season of Advent begins this Sunday in many denominations of Christianity. These four weeks of Advent are a time of soulful preparation through *self-reflection, repentance*, and the *expectant* waiting for the birth of Jesus.

It is a time for us to start over, to unburden our hearts from the weight of worldly worries, fears and to renew our commitment to a regular pattern of prayer, worship, and Christian action.

It is time to remember to answer the call to *increase and abound in love for one another*, to restore our faith, and to be ready for *that day* that will come for us all. If we are not *alert*, *that day* may arrive *unexpectedly, like a trap*, and catch us unprepared.

Too often we are caught up in the earthly distractions of the season. The word advent means *coming*, and we will mark each week by the lighting of a candle in an Advent Wreath with a prayerful reflection before the Liturgy begins. Each candle represents a theme from the readings of that week.

Some of us will use an Advent Calendar or wreath at home to mark each day of the week with a special prayer or meditation on the theme. Advent is the opportunity to be more intentional about preparing for the arrival of Jesus, our Saviour.

The Advent season reminds us through the words of *Jesus* and people like *John the Baptist, Paul* and the Hebrew prophets that we should always be prepared for Jesus' return because we don't know exactly when this will take place.

His reappearance will catch many people unprepared just as a thief comes to steal during the night. Here is a Ghanaian folklore: Once upon a time there was a spider called *Kwaku Anansi* that lived in a cornfield. Kwaku Anansi was a big spider and he had spun a beautiful web between the corn stalks. He got fat eating all the bugs that caught in his web. He liked his home and planned to stay there for the rest of his life.

One day the Kwaku Anansi caught a little bug in his web, and just as the spider was about to eat him, the bug said, "*If you let me go I will tell you something important that will save your life.*" Kwaku Anansi paused for a moment and listened because he was amused."

You better get out of this cornfield," the little bug said, "The harvest is coming!" The spider smiled and said, "What is this harvest you are talking about? I think you are just telling me a story." But the little bug said, "Oh no, it is true. The owner of this field is coming to harvest it soon.

All the stalks will be knocked down and the corn will be gathered up. You will be killed by the giant machines if you stay here." Kwaku Anansi said, "I don't believe in harvests and giant machines that knock down corn stalks. How can you prove this?"

The little bug continued, "Just look at the corn. See how it is planted in rows? It proves this field was created by an intelligent farmer." The Kwaku Anansi laughed and said, "This field has evolved and has nothing to do with a farmer. Corn always grows that way." The bug went on to explain, "Oh no. This field belongs to the owner who planted it, and the harvest is coming soon."

Kwaku Anansi smiled and said to the little bug, "I don't believe you," and then the Kwaku Anansi ate the little bug for lunch. A few days later, the *Kwaku Anansi* was laughing about the story the little bug had told him. He thought to himself, "A harvest! What a joke. I have lived here all of my life and nothing has ever disturbed me.

I have been here since these stalks were just a foot off the ground, and I'll be here for the rest of my life, because nothing is ever going to change in this field. Life is good, and I have it made." The next day was a beautiful sunny day in the cornfield. The sky above was clear and there was no wind at all.

That afternoon as Kwaku Anansi was about to take a nap, when he noticed some thick dusty clouds moving toward him. He could hear the roar of a great engine and he said to himself, "*I wonder what that could be?*" "*I wonder what that could be?*"

Jesus knew that when he came a second time there would be many people who would say, "*I wonder what that could be?*" and so he went to a lot of effort to tell us that he *will* return and that we need to always be ready.

Jesus concludes, "Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming— it might be in the *evening* or at *midnight* or before *dawn* or at *sunrise*. If he comes suddenly, he must not find you and I asleep. What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!"

When Jesus ascended to his father in heaven, he left us in charge and gave us instructions what we are to do while he is away:

- Go, make disciples of all nations... baptize...
- love one another....be kind to one another....pray for one another...
- do this often as you drink in remembrance of me... trust, and believe in God...
- worship, study, pray, teach, listen to God's Word, live as God's people.

He will come again and he wants us to be always ready for his return. There is no room for leaving things to the last minute. Jesus leaves us in no doubt whatsoever that the day will come when the history of this world as we know it, will be drawn to a close. The last page of the world's history will contain a description of what took place when Jesus returned.

*"There will be the shout of command, the archangel's voice, the sound of God's trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven" (1 Thess 4:16).*

When this happens fear will grip the hearts of many people. People will run this way and that way to escape. Everyone will faint from terror, everyone except people of faith.

According to Jesus, people of faith need not panic when they see this happening. Jesus says, "*When these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your salvation is near.*"

How can I say that we do not need to panic and be terrified like the rest of the world when Jesus comes as judge? After all, aren't we all sinners, people who have disobeyed God? Haven't we been loveless? Haven't we been too eager to offer excuses rather than live as one of God's people? On what basis can it be said that we have nothing to fear on the day Jesus returns?

Friends, there are two ways to view Christ's return in the eyes of a believer:

- ❖ Firstly, people can ignore their sin and the fact that Jesus will come again.
- ❖ On the other hand, people who have acknowledged their sinfulness, and have received God's forgiveness, don't have to panic when they face the end. If all our wrongs have been removed, wiped out, eliminated, by the forgiveness that Jesus won for us by dying on the cross.

For Christians the return of Jesus is not something to fear. In fact, when everyone else around us is overcome by panic, we can stand up and raise our heads, because our redemption is drawing near the Bible tells us.

Our baptism assures us that we have nothing to fear when Christ returns. Not many of us can remember the day we were baptized but that doesn't reduce its significance or power one bit.

In baptism, we are united with Jesus Christ in such a way that the power of sin to condemn us is destroyed. The baptism *Xavier Emmitt Szynsiak* should remind us all of our own baptism. In baptism we receive God's forgiveness, and are given the promise that we shall live with God forever when our life here on earth is over.

From the day of our baptism on and throughout our lives, we acknowledge our sins against God, and we claim the promise of forgiveness, which God gives us in baptism. Daily our sins are judged; daily we are forgiven; daily we are made new and clean. Do you believe that promise?

Therefore, we need not fear the end of the world, because our sin has been dealt with at the baptismal font. While the rest of the world is cowering in fear, Christians stand tall with uplifted heads because they have been washed pure and blameless by the blood of Jesus.

This first advent of Jesus into our world was indeed very ordinary and humble, but we know what great blessings the tiny baby in the manger brought to our world. This week Jesus tells us that his *words will never pass away* no matter what else happens. Through prayer and attention to our call, we will be ready to *stand before the Son of Man*.

Our Hope truly is in the name and substance of the Lord, and, in our willingness to turn the thoughts and actions of our lives toward the light of God's presence now and going forward.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, "*Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness.*" We light this week's candle of *Hope* to brighten the way ahead and to know that *All the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies* [Psalm 25:9].

Hope is on first and we begin with *Hope* in mind. It is my hope that when Christ comes, he will find each and every one of us *faithful* to his Word. He will find us *believing* on his finished work of the cross. He will find us *courageous* amid the turmoil of our time. He will find us always moving forward, continually in faith, until That Day.

Christ *will* come again, and / or I will get there before he comes here ~ will I be ready either way? Never have we needed hope and self-reflection with faith-filled soul preparation more than now. Just look at what is happening around the world!

May He will find us ready standing up and with our heads rise in great **hope** and **expectation**, because we do not have to be afraid of Jesus' return. As we progress through the Advent season, let's join with the church of all ages and say, "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" Come into my heart as the Christ-child. Come here to stay. **Amen.**