

**November 29, 2020**

TODAY WE ENTER THE SEASON OF ADVENT.

Each week we will address one of the four major themes of this season as we light the candles of our Advent Wreath. In years past, we have gathered as a community to light the candles on the church Advent - - this year we will each light the candles on our home Advent wreaths. (and I hope as you do so – you will post a picture on our parish Facebook page or website).

The candles represent the four gifts of Advent:  
HOPE , PEACE , JOY and LOVE.

This morning, as we light the Candle of Hope, I would like to gather our attention to the themes of WATCHING , WAITING , and HOPING. Because I believe these themes are difficult for us as Christians in this time and in this place.

As a society which has been isolated for eight months – we are more than prepared for Advent. We have been watching and waiting and hoping all these days ...

Watching takes time -- time for reflection. To reflect on the things that are happening in our own life, in our world. A time to reflect on the past, present and future.

Reflection is a valuable part of watching. I know I cannot watch for an something to happen unless I have had time to imagine what may occur.

Usually life happens too quickly today for us to enter into meaningful reflection. We are reactors - responding to what has happened rather than reflecting on certain actions and planning ahead to meet opportunities or to prevent disasters from taking place.

Before the pandemic, our world was operating at a frantic pace, and because of that, we no longer watched. We were often rushing on to the next activity or event ... and didn't expect God to act in our future because we don't take the time to reflect on God's actions in our past or in our present.

The pandemic gave us reason and opportunity to pause and reflect ...

The season of ADVENT calls us to watch. To take the time to reflect upon God's past, present and probable future action in our lives, and in the life of the world. If we can anticipate it, we will watch for it, and we will be less likely to miss it when it comes.

Our world knows how to watch - how to anticipate. Just not often around God.

On June 25th someone (usually a news anchor or talk-show host) will remind us that Christmas is only six months away. The day after Halloween we begin the great countdown to Christmas (how many days are left to shop and buy material gifts). There is no possible way we can miss Christmas.

But in the church - we have ADVENT. A season of watching. Where we are called to take the time before Christmas to watch. To not get caught up in the Christmas event (because Christmas has its own season) - but instead to pause and reflect. To wait for Christmas to come upon us, and not to rush it.

That's in every other year.

And while I usually rant about those folks who hang their decorations before the third Sunday of Advent, or the stores that start putting out their decorations and "Christmas promotions" in September ... I'm not this year. Because we need some Christmas. Our world, our community, our families, and ourselves ... have been literally living in Advent, since March. The season of hopeful expectation – of watching for God to come into our world with such force, and healing and restoration, that we will soon have Covid behind us.

And we waited – and waited – and waited.

Ours may be a world that knows how to WATCH, but we are not very good at WAITING. Our pre-covid world was fast-moving...quick and constant. We had been shaped by fast cars, instant cash from bank machines, and rapid micro-wave cooking.

I remember visiting a friend (some time ago) who was showing me something on her computer. She was working on a design for a deck at the back of her house. She had fed all the data into her computer and had looked at it on screen, but now she wanted to print a picture of it.

It took a few minutes for the computer to switch from view mode to print mode, and because it was a colour picture in three-dimensions she had to wait for the printer to do its stuff.

Frustrated at the snails-pace of all this, she went in to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. She filled a mug with water and popped it into the microwave.

While somewhat annoyed at waiting for the printer she now had to wait 60 seconds for her water.

Somewhere in that process, my mind flashed back to a time, not that long ago. A time when computers were

not all that common, and where microwaves were not a necessary appliance in every kitchen. A time when water could only be boiled on the stove, and where a drawing for a deck could only be done by a draftsman. And I laughed.

Those days seem so long ago. Waiting more than two minutes for hot water.....And if you had to go pump your water from a well and then boil it on a woodstove (which really wasn't all that long ago) then getting your cup of tea could have taken 30 minutes.

THE DARK AGES - that's what we call those times now.  
THE UNENLIGHTENED YEARS.

What would we possibly do in that half-hour?

We never have to answer that question, because we live in a world of instant gratification. If we want something we simply go out and get it. If we can't afford it, well then we buy it anyway on credit. If we have the money then the stores want our money right away (and if we don't carry cash then we just hand over our debit cards and zip - the money is now in their account).

And this is true in our spiritual lives as well. If we pray for something, and don't get it quickly, then we often conclude that God doesn't want us to have it, or that our faith is too weak, or that God just doesn't exist.

It rarely occurs to us to wait. We want results, we want action, and we want it in our own time not God's ... And OUR TIME means we want it now.

Waiting isn't an option.

But when we do wait for something, the anticipation builds.

We watch for when it might be coming, we prepare ourselves for its arrival, we look at the world around us, and all that is going on, and pray that what we are waiting for is a part of it all.

And when it does come, we are ready, and we value it.

Advent calls us to wait.

To look for, and anticipate, the coming of Christ into our lives and into this world.

And we do our watching and our waiting, IN HOPE.

Advent calls us to hope for the coming of Christ. And this is a positive hope, which comes from taking the time to watch and wait expectantly.

It comes from knowing that we already belong to Christ, and already live in full communion with him and with

each other, here in his creation. And that we do so, through our baptism in his name.

In our gospel we hear "Watch - for you do not know when the Master of the house will come". And this is the call of Advent. The call to watch and wait and hope. It is not about getting ready. It is about being ready. It is about actively waiting ....

TRUE & GENUINE WAITING is creative. It has the ability to grasp the future here in the present. For in our passion and our hope for the time that is to come, we have already taken a step towards that time coming into being...Even if it turns out to be different from our dreams.

And that is the waiting to which ADVENT calls us. (and I could easily argue that it is also what Pandemic waiting is as well). The waiting which longs for the reign of God to show itself in our world in peace and justice, in hope and love, and in the lives of the men and women and children who live together on this planet.

Have a good Advent. And may these next 26 days be a time of meaningful watching, waiting and hoping, for you and for us all.