

“Worth the Wait: Hope”

Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

December 3, 2017 (First Sunday of Advent)

“Advent” is the period of preparation for the annual commemoration of the Birth of Christ. The word “advent” comes from the Latin “adventus”, which means “coming”.

For the Early Christian Church, Easter was far and away the more major festival. “Advent” did not make its way onto the Church calendar or into the Christian lexicon until the festival of Christmas was established, and that was in the fourth century. With the celebration of the Incarnation—God becoming Human—the Church soon felt the need to engage in a period of preparation. Originally set at a length of 40 days, it represented the 4000 years of patient, expectant waiting on the part of the Hebrew people for the promised Messiah.

The heart of Advent is expectant waiting—heightened anticipation! The heart of Advent is resilient hope! The birth of the Messiah, it was determined, is surely “worth the wait”!

Our lives are crucibles of waiting for THIS and waiting for THAT, and not always with relaxed patience, and not always with happy results. Loyal fans of a professional baseball team waited well over 100 years for the sport’s ultimate prize. Our nation waited 18 months for the most recent presidential campaign to mercilessly run its course. American women waited generations for the right to exercise a vote. All of this contradicts the cultural context in which we have been molded: an era of instant communication—instant gratification—instant everything! Having to wait is not always greeted with relaxed patience, nor rewarded with happy results.

I waited impatiently an additional day on my journey this past week to visit kids and grandkids because of unexpected but necessary brake work on my van. That rewarded me, happily, with extra time with a son and daughter-in-law, but, unhappily, with an \$800 charge on a credit card!

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The lesson in the 13th chapter of the Gospel of Mark is that Jesus’s disciples must be sure to apply the teachings of the Messiah in their daily encounters, while they are waiting for the Messiah to return! For they will NOT know the day nor the hour!

This passage in Mark divides naturally into three sections. The first is comprised of verses 24-27, the apocalyptic notion that God will act decisively at the end of history, to transform Creation:

“The sun will be darkened...the moon will not give its light...the stars will fall from heaven...the very powers in the heavens will be shaken!” The Son of God will gather the elect—that’s us folks, the Church!—into full fellowship not previously experienced. By Divine intervention, Creation will be turned upside down, and a new age ushered in! That is Hope! That is surely “worth the wait”!

The second section of the passage is comprised of verses 28-31: The destruction of the former age, and the arrival of the new age, may be anticipated just like a fig tree anticipates its flowering fulfillment in the sprintime. But in the meantime, do not be deceived by false messiahs! Verse 31 is reassuring: *“Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will not pass away”*. In other words, even if the Church—the elect—cannot discern God’s intervention as readily as one discerns the future of a blossoming fig tree, the Church CAN trust in God’s ultimate guardianship of the future. That is Hope! That is surely “worth the wait”!

It is in the third section of the passage—verses 32 and 33—that warns the Church not to assume that it will know exactly when God will so act: *“Beware! Keep alert!”* Like responsible workers, the Church must continue its mission even while uncertain about the day or the hour of God’s intervention! The trouble in the world will not be eliminated, even with the efforts of the elect, and may even grow worse! The future is in God’s hands! Disciples must so trust—without despair!

The true Christmas season is not about “Black Fridays” and “Premium Outlets”. It’s about waiting...expecting...anticipating...HOPING for the Advent of a new age. That is surely “worth the wait!”

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Recall with me the true story of the incomparably loyal dog “Hachi”, portrayed in poignant cinema a few years ago. Hachi was an Akita born in 1923 on a farm in Japan. The dog’s owner was a professor of agriculture at the University of Tokyo named Hidesaburo Ueno. The professor commuted roundtrip daily by train from his village to Tokyo and back, and Hachi learned to make his way to the station at 5:00 every evening to welcome his master home. His dependable routine was witnessed and encouraged by the friendly vendors and passengers around the station. One evening, the professor did not disembark from the 5:00 train—he had died that day while teaching a class at the University.

Though confused, of course, Hachi commenced the next day to return to the station at 5:00, and the next day, and the next...for nine years, until his own death—loyally waiting for the professor to come again. For those nine years, Hachi was adopted and cared for by the station’s vendors and passengers. To this day, a bronze statue of Hachi, waiting patiently for his master’s return, marks the entrance to the Shiboyo Train Station in Japan.

The lesson for disciples of the Church, on the First Sunday of Advent, is that they should apply the teachings of Jesus in the daily encounters that life brings, while they are waiting for the Messiah! Meet your responsibilities as a loyal follower of Jesus. Embrace every opportunity to speak and act as Jesus would speak and act. You do not know the day, nor the hour! Keep alert! Creation will be turned upside down, and a new age ushered in, and your heart will be spiritually revived and renewed!

That is Hope! And that is surely “worth the wait”!