

Thanksgiving Sunday

November 27, 2016

We do a lot of waiting at this time of year.

We wait for relatives to arrive, turkeys to be done, pumpkin pie to be served.

We wait for cookies to bake, school to get out, for Santa Claus, and we wait in lines.

We wait in lines at the bank, the grocery store, the gas station, the post office.

Some of us wait patiently.

Some do not.

Have you ever watched people wait in lines?

Small children don't wait.

They move.

Constantly.

They swing on the ropes that guide the lines, they swing on the posts that hold the ropes, they dance, they sing, they whine.

Rarely do they wait quietly.

Many adults don't wait quietly, either.

Some adults stand straight as an arrow, staring straight ahead, hardly aware of their surroundings.

Some people shift from one foot to the other and back again – like a jumping bean.

They sigh and shift their packages from one arm to the other, and back again, and sigh louder.

Some people strike up conversations with perfect strangers – not wanting to endure the waiting experience alone.

Depending on the day and your mood, you might be a starrer, a jumper or a talker.

Depending on the day, and your mood, you might wait patiently, impatiently, or with anticipation.

Advent is a time of waiting.

It is a time of waiting for the Messiah to come.

"But wait!" you say.

"The Messiah has already come."

Yes, the Messiah has already come.

But the Messiah will come again – that is what we are waiting for.

We live in a between time, a time when the Kingdom of God has begun, but has not yet fully come.

Our scripture lessons this morning focus on Christ's coming in glory and majesty at the end of the world.

In the passage from Isaiah, we are told what the world will be like when the Kingdom comes.

There will be no more wars.

Everyone will get along with everyone else.

There will be no jealousy, or selfishness.

There will be no divisions between God's people.

In the Romans passage, Paul tells us God's kingdom has already started.

We are to live as citizens of God's kingdom.

We are to live without jealousy or hatred.

In the Gospel lesson, we are told we don't know how or when Christ will come, and Jesus urges us to always be ready to enter God's kingdom.

All those people who were predicting the end of time in the year 2000 certainly didn't know what they were talking about.

It may happen in the year 2017.

It may not happen until the year 20,000.

Only God knows.

The focus of our scripture lessons is not meant to scare us, rather to prepare us for the glorious day when Christ will return.

How do we, in the between times, wait for the Lord?

We wait by preparing ourselves for the Lord's coming.

Being prepared means being ready for Christ every day, in every relationship, in every deed.

Like children who decide they will be on their best behavior from Thanksgiving till Christmas Eve, just in case Santa Claus is watching, we cannot live an un-Christian life, and then expect to change our ways a day or two before Christ arrives.

In the Romans passage, Paul says we should "conduct ourselves properly, as people who live in the light of day – no wild parties, don't get drunk, or be indecent . . . don't quarrel or be jealous . . . Then you won't try to satisfy your selfish desires."

That is rather difficult in this season when television, radio, newspapers and magazines tell us to buy, buy, buy.

Buy to make your mother-in-law happy, buy to make your children happy, buy to make yourself happy.

Buy, buy, buy.

The more you give, the happier you'll be.

The more you give, the better person you'll be.

Yet, giving is not the focus of Jesus' words.

Remember, when Jesus told of his second coming, there was no Christmas!

Christmas was not celebrated until the fourth century, and then it was only as a religious holiday.

It has only been in the last century that Christmas turned from a religious holiday to a secular orgy of consumerism.

What can we, 21st century American Christians, do to prepare for the Lord in this Advent season?

There are gifts to be bought, wrapped and mailed.

There are cookies to bake, candles to make.

We don't want to miss the Nutcracker, open houses, office parties, or our child's school performances.

If your family is typical, there is something doing for someone every night, and on weekends, between now and Christmas.

So what is it that 'gives' in your family?

Too often what 'gives' is the reason for the season.

Too often, even as Christians who wait for, who hope for, who expect the coming of Christ, it is Christ whom we forget.

We need our focus to be on our spiritual preparation for the coming of Christ.

As someone once said, it wasn't raining when Noah started building the ark!

Noah knew judgment was coming "soon," but he did not know the exact timetable of the Lord.

While he labored at building the ark, the rest of his neighbors went about their common, every-person, every-day affairs.

"Eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" does not describe any uniquely awful behavior the people were displaying.

On the contrary, they are cited as examples of everyday life.

But to go on with "business as usual" without concern or consideration about something as certain (but uncertain as to time) as God's promise of judgment for evildoing?

It is the people's fixated commitment to "business as usual" that condemns them.

It is our business as usual that condemns us.

God has standards.

We are judged by how well we live up to God's standards, not the world's standards.

God judges not only our actions, but our attitudes and involvements.

We live a Christian life as our response to God's love for us shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Living a Christian life doesn't mean standing in line, staring into space, waiting for Jesus and unaware of our surroundings.

Living a Christian life means striking up a relationship with someone who is hungry, someone who is poor, someone who is homeless, someone who is in prison and telling them what God has done through Jesus Christ.

In the gospel lesson, Jesus talks about the people who are taken into God's kingdom, and those who are not.

Those people who are living their lives in relation to God are those who will enter the Kingdom.

Those who are more concerned with God than with themselves are those who will enter the Kingdom.

There will be no appeal, no "wait a minute Lord, I can live my life better," when the Lord comes.

There will only be God's decision.

As children of God, it is our responsibility to live a Christian life every day, for tomorrow, Christ may come.