

Matthew 24:36-44
Waiting for the Unexpected
Sunday November 27th, 2016

As I contemplated this message, I kept thinking about people who wait for the “unexpected”: Firefighters for a fire, EMTs to pick a person up after a fall, and Emergency Room personal for the inevitable casualties from the family after Thanksgiving dinner football game. They wait on, what is really not unexpected, for fires will happen, people will fall and people get hurt in the friendliest of games.

What is unexpected is the timing and what is important is the preparation and how we wait. This Jesus addresses in our scripture today. Waiting is part of the season of Advent, waiting for the Christ child, waiting for Christmas, waiting for Christ to return.

For a child it takes forever to get to Christmas. For the adults who are unprepared Christmas is too suddenly here. And for pregnant women, like Mary, it can't get here soon enough. Time and waiting during this season of the year is experienced so differently by everyone.

Waiting is much of the experience of the Bible. This prophecy from the book of Isaiah was made 700 years before Christ was born. “Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? **Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” Is. 7:13-14**

Can you imagine waiting 700 years for a prophecy to be fulfilled? Can you imagine waiting for a prophecy to be fulfilled that was made in the year 1300? Well, we can, because it's been almost 2000 years since Jesus promised his return that we read about today. There is great expectation in the waiting. Hope we are ready!

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When Jesus was born the waiting began again, and we might be thinking, “What in the world was God thinking, sending the hope of the world in the form of a baby?”

When I was three years old my twin brother and sister were born. In the months leading up to their birth my mom and dad told me I was going to have new brothers or sisters, and I was very excited about the thought of having someone new to play with. I was looking forward to having a brother I could climb trees with and play in the barn and explore the pastures and orchards of the ranch. Boy did I have a shock.

I was ushered into the room where my twin brother and sister were asleep in a crib. I was invited to look over the edge of the crib at them and my first response was deep disappointment. I said with disgust and surprise, "They're babies!!!"

The waiting began again because they had to grow up!!

The waiting began again as Jesus grew up and continues for us today as we await his return.

Now here Jesus is telling us not to waste our time speculating about when he would return. Verse 36 is very clear about this. Jesus said, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Actually, we as Methodists do take Jesus at his word. We don't spend a lot of time speculating about when Jesus is coming back. We don't talk a lot about end times, the rapture, the tribulation, etc. Because in the end, it will happen when God has planned for it to happen, and in the meantime, we need to wait on God, serve God.

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Some groups over the years have spent way too much time speculating on the end times. They quit their jobs, and they withdrew from society. They stood staring up into the sky rather than looking around them to do the waiting God called them to do. The Leonid Meteor shower of 1833 during the "Great Awakening" here in America was catalyst for such groups.

Dr. William Barclay wrote this, "The time is known to God alone, so to speculate regarding the time of the second coming is nothing less than blasphemy for anyone, so speculating is seeking to wrest from God

secrets that belong to God alone. It is no one's duty to speculate; it is our duty to prepare ourselves and to watch."

We do not know when Jesus will return, and this heaven and earth will end, and the New Heaven and New Earth begin. And we do not know our own death, where instead of Christ coming to us, we will go home to Christ.

One ancient writer wrote this about our Matthew reading, "Why is the date of an individual's death hidden from him/her? Clearly, it is so that he might always do good, since he can expect to die at any moment. The date of Christ's second advent is withheld from the world for the same reason, namely, **so that every generation might live in the expectation of Christ's return.**"

The idea to take home today is to not wonder and hope you are ready for Christ's Advent or appearance in your life. **The idea is to be ready!!** Don't speculate about it; simply be ready as we wait for Christ's return!!! And this is how!!

One pastor pointed out there are two ways of thinking about and acting out **"waiting on the Lord."**

One way to think about it is like **a child "waiting for Christmas"**, or standing around "waiting for a bus", or "waiting for it to rain."

Another way to think about "waiting" is in terms of serving. **A waitress "waiting on" you or serving you!**

Today, I would submit to you that we should "wait on the Lord" in that second sense. Between now and whenever Jesus comes back, **we should wait on the Lord by serving the Lord.** We should wait on God by serving God! In fact, I believe that is what Jesus meant when he said in verse 44, **"Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."**

To get ready for Jesus' return is to be ready, and we get ready by serving the Lord. This comes out very clearly in the next four parables

that follow our reading in Matthew. Jesus is explaining to us how to live lives that are ready for his return.

The first Parable is “**The Good and Wicked Servants**”, Matt. 24:45-51. In this parable the wicked servant turned on his fellow servants out of boredom because his Master was delayed in returning. We see this most clearly in young kids on a car trip. Have you ever heard, “Are we there yet?” And who has ever had to break up kids fighting with each other on a car trip with these words, “Stop touching each other?” Which was followed by a small voice saying, “He’s breathing on me.”

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The Parable of “The Good and Wicked Servants” is followed by the three Parables of the Kingdom of God in Chapter 25. These parables teach us how to enter the Kingdom of God here on earth and the Kingdom to come. **They teach us how to wait on Christ by serving Christ.**

The second parable is the Parable of the “**Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids**”. The “oil” that the wise bridesmaids had and the foolish didn’t were “good works.” In the New Testament, “oil” is a symbol or metaphor for Good Works. The Wise Bridesmaids had their “good works” in order and the Foolish didn’t.

The third parable is that of the **Talents**. Its point is to use the gifts and talents God has given you to advance the Kingdom of God here on earth. **Again we “wait” by serving others with what we have.**

The fourth parable is that of the “**Sheep and the Goats**”. It makes the point in the strongest terms that we wait on; we serve God, by serving the least of these. We serve; we wait on God by clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and those in prison. There is nothing more dangerous than being useless in these parables.

So, more personally, **what are YOU doing to wait on the Lord, as you wait on the Lord’s return?** What are you doing “to be ready” besides hoping. We can be much more confident than just saying, “Hope I am ready.” Vista Church offers many opportunities to be ready for Christ’s

return through waiting on others, serving others. We collect for the foodbank. We serve in innumerable ways in Agua Prieta. We are about to present the most beautiful cantata you can invite friends too.

Now many think our Gospel lesson today refers to “The Rapture” when believers will be taken up from earth to avoid the “Tribulation”, a time of great suffering before Christ’s return. Verses 40 & 41 say, **“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.”**

But one commentator said this: **“To be a believer is to endure faithfully the tribulation, which is part of the church’s mission, not to escape from it.”** Have you ever thought that some of the hardships you have in life, particularly with the church, or those in the church, are God’s way of testing your faith and growing you in it?

Much speculation has been had about whether or not Christians will go through the “Tribulation” spoken of in Revelation. Have you ever thought you don’t have to wait for that time of the testing of your faith, but you can and do experience it now? The Covid Pandemic has been such a time of testing!

Have you stood firm in faith and supported your church by your presence. Our denominational human sexuality debate has been a tribulation for all. Have you stood firm in your faith and your support for your local Church, Vista Church? Have you? Our Romans reading was very explicit in telling us to avoid **“dissension and jealousy”**. Have we?

And if you are experiencing tribulation now and holding onto your faith, its God’s gift to you to help you grow in your faith! **Count it all joy my brothers and sisters when you encounter various trials,.. because the end result of our endurance through such trials is that you may be complete, perfect, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2**

Think about that when you think you want to quit, or quit giving financially, or serving. Believe it or not the hard times and disappointments you feel with the church and those in the church are God’s gift to you to help you grow!

Every Sunday we pray, “Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.” Don’t you remember that means, “**Lord, don’t lead us into a time of trial and hard testing of our faith, but if you do, keep us loyal to our faith and to your Church?**” I’ve preached on this many times! Does it make more sense now if you are going through a trial of faith with your church?

Personally, I have hated those times. I can remember on several occasions just saying to God, “I quit!” I remember once at First Mesa church, I got so upset because the Family Life Center project that I had spent years on, hit a dead end, that I just lay on the floor of my office and said, “I quit!” A while later God got me up. God gave me a new way of approaching the vision he gave me and ten years later (a long wait) brought that vision to fruition.

Our times of waiting, hardship and hoping can be a great gift of God to build our faith. If we endure and hold onto our commitment!

James 1:12 **“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”**

Now happy churches are serving churches. They have a common focus and direction. Our common focus and goal this year has been “Connect and Grow”! We are still working on that.

Well, for many here, the active days of serving which require heavy lifting, and toting, and hauling, those days are over. I don’t lift church pressed-board tables anymore after having hernia surgery twice. But...have you ever thought of these two words, **“Worship & Service?”** Our worship is our most basic service to God: to worship God is to serve God and to serve God is to worship God. **The word “Worship” actually means “service”.**

Here’s a visual:

Worship=service=waiting=service=worship

That is partly why I put our church announcements at the end of our service. When I give the benediction our “worship” of God doesn’t end. If God has spoken to you and you are answering the question, “What am I going to do?” Worship is just beginning again. It continues as we go out into the world to serve others. That’s why the banner over our front door says, “You are now entering the Mission Field”. We simply enter another place and a different way of worshipping God.

Our corporate worship together on Sunday’s is a most beautiful way to serve the Lord. It is a most beautiful way to wait on the Lord until he returns. And if you are waiting for something to arrive either good or bad, isn’t it better to have someone to wait with you? That is what happens when we are together in our worship services.

That is why our vow of “Presence” is so important and I encourage people to be present in worship as often as possible.

I want to encourage you, as I close this message, to invite someone to wait with you, to serve with you in this season. In your bulletin you will find a flyer you can share with someone or put up in public place to invite others to our Cantata and Christmas eve services. Many people will respond to such an invitation.

Here’s a fun reminder now as we close out this message:

ROLL: Grandma Invite

Will you take the time, the patience, the endurance to invite again and again and again leaving the results to God?

Go, invite others, and with great hope, wait on the Lord!