

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 Doctors for the inevitable casualties from the after Thanksgiving Dinner family football game. They wait on what is really not unexpected... for fires will happen, people will fall, and people will be injured in the friendliest of games.

What is unexpected is the timing and what is important is the preparation and how we wait. All First Responders prepare for the “unexpected” while they wait. Waiting is what Jesus addresses in our scripture today. Waiting is part of the season of Advent, waiting for the Christ child, waiting for Christ to return.

For a child it takes forever to get to Christmas. For the adults Christmas is too suddenly here. And for a pregnant woman, like the Virgin 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 the experience of the Bible. The prophecy from the book of Isaiah that was read today was made 700 years before Christ was born. It's complete fulfillment when **“Nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”** It is still being waited for, hoped for.

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? I guess we can, because it's been almost 2000 years since Jesus promised his return that we read about in Matthew. There is great expectation in the waiting. Hope we are ready!

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. 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 that of 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, to serve God.

Some groups over the years have spent way too much time speculating on the end times. They quit jobs, they withdrew from society. They stood staring up at the sky rather than looking around them to do the waiting God called them to do.

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 end, 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."

This is a set of sculptures called "Waiting" that's in downtown Mesa:



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 sense. Between now and whenever Jesus comes back **we should wait on the Lord by serving the Lord**. We should wait on God! In fact, I would submit to you 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 is to be and get ready by serving the Lord.

This comes out very clearly in the next four parables that follow our reading in Matthew.

First is the Parable of “The Good and Wicked Servants”, Matt. 24:45-51. In this parable the wicked servant turned on his fellow servants out of boredom as 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.”

This parable is then followed by the three Parables of the Kingdom of God in Chapter 25. These three 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 then is the Parable of the **“Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids”**. The “oil” that the wise bridesmaids had and the foolish didn’t was “good works.” In the New Testament, “oil” is a symbol or metaphor for Good Works. The Wise Bridesmaids had their “good works”, their service, 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.

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. And we are about to present the most beautiful living Christmas card to the communities of Catalina, Oracle, Oro Valley and Tucson as we put on the Walk to Bethlehem.

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.

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?

And if you are experiencing tribulation now and holding onto your faith, is God's gift to you to help you grow in your faith? Think about that the next time you think you want to quit, or quit giving financially, or serving. The hard times and disappointments you feel in life and with the church and those in the church are God's gift to you to help you grow?

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.

Now happy churches are serving churches. They have a common focus and direction. We had a “Dream Sunday” 2 weeks ago and it will take several years for the bigger dreams to happen. Some of the smaller ones are already in the works like hand rails in the front of the Chancel area. So don’t get frustrated. Don’t say, “Are we there yet?” This is going to take a while.

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 to have 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.

Here’s a visual:

Worship=service=waiting=service=worship

This 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. It continues as we go out into the world to serve others. As 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.

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 Walk to Bethlehem. That is spiritual space and many people will respond to such an invitation.

For the next four weeks, many ads will be placed in 10 to 13 different mediums: the newspapers, on KLOV radio station, FLR, and the internet, inviting people to come to our special Christmas services and programs like the Walk to Bethlehem, our Chancel Choir's Christmas program and Christmas Eve services.

The enclosed flyer is a way for you to invite others in.

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

ROLL: Christmas Invite

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