

Advent 1-December 3, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Isaiah 64:1-9, 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Mark 13:24-37

Waiting in Certain Hope Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, who was, who is, and who is to come. Amen

It seems like we're always waiting for something. The more conveniences we have at our fingertips, I think the less patient we are when we must wait for something we want. We really don't have to go shopping anymore and wait in checkout lines now that you can shop from home. You don't have to go to a store and search to see if the store has what you want, instead Amazon will tell you how many they have left and when you can expect your purchase to arrive. You no longer keep a ledger to know how much money is left in your account or wait until you go to your bank to ask for your balance. Balances are as close as opening an app on your mobile phone and are updated immediately. You don't have to wait for a physician to call you with lab results that you used to have to wait for. Now you are notified with an app from your health provider as soon as they are completed. We used to have to wait until the following week to see the next episode of our favorite tv series. Streaming services have eliminated the need for waiting. You can binge watch what you want to watch whenever you want. They are even good at keeping track of which episode is next in the series to watch, but they still haven't figured out how to pause the program when I doze off to sleep.

Not everything can be fixed quickly with an app on your phone or the click of a mouse on your computer. Last Thursday, we had a sewer line plug in our house. I found a company I hadn't heard of before with an impressive online ad. I gave them a call. It was obvious this company had hired a dispatching service that was not very local, and I was told that they would be able to arrive as soon as next Monday. I called another company, and they gave me a much more favorable window of arrival sometime that same morning. I still had to wait, and I still wondered if they would be able to fix the problem. They promised to arrive, but there were no promises made on delivering a successful solution. The response from this company was hopeful, but there were no guarantees promised.

The Advent season is often considered as a time of waiting. We mark this time of waiting with the lighting of four candles representing four weeks of waiting until Christmas and the arrival of Jesus in the manger. But as the season of Advent begins, there is no talk in our scriptures today about waiting for Jesus to be born. The focus for this first Sunday in Advent is the second coming or the second advent of Jesus. And for that we must wait. No technologies such as a biblical app on your phone have changed the reality that we don't know when this will take place. Jesus will come again only when his Father decides the time is right.

We know of other denominations who seem to think they have some divine connections with the God the Father that even Jesus doesn't have and have been made privy of his timing of the second coming of Christ. I have had several Lutherans even tell me that they thought or felt like Jesus might come again in their lifetimes. Many of these people who had told me this, I can now tell you, were wrong. They were wrong about the timing, but they were right that he would come again.

Jesus compares his second arrival or advent to a lesson that can be learned from the fig tree. The people that Jesus was talking to knew what to expect from fig trees. They knew when leaves started to appear, it wouldn't be long before fruit would also be produced and there would soon be a harvest. We probably would better understand the fig tree comparison if we talked about a corn plant. We know we see

tassels come out on corn plants and ears being formed, there is a good chance there will be a harvest. The tassel doesn't predict the exact date of the harvest, but it does tell you that harvest is closer than when you planted the seeds.

We have come to really like precision, knowing the timing of things and immediate satisfaction and are very patient when we must wait. Jesus does not leave us only with uncertainty. In fact, when Jesus speaks about his second coming, he declares to you and me what is for sure. Jesus tells us that when everything we have depended on in this life goes away and when Jesus comes, everything will, there will be something that will never pass away. Jesus tells his disciples and tells us what is certain. His words.

Whenever Jesus gives us a command or tells us to do something, we think we can do it, but in the end, we will fail. Jesus commanded his disciples before he went to the cross to stay awake. Jesus tells them to be awake at night or when the rooster crows or in the morning. What did the disciples do at night when told them to stay awake when He prayed in the Garden? They may have started with good intentions, but before long, they forgot what Jesus told them to do and they went asleep. When Peter heard the rooster crow, it did not awaken him to confess Jesus as his Lord. Instead, he said, "I don't know the man." On Easter morning when Jesus told his disciples that he would arise from the grave, they were not there to welcome him out of his grave and celebrate his resurrection. They hid from him in fear of what he would say to them. You and I are no better than Jesus' disciples at keeping his word of law. Isaiah rightly declared that even our most righteous deeds are nothing but filthy rags in the sight of the Lord.

However, God's law is only one certain word from our Lord. The other word is the gospel, and these words of promise will never pass away. These words do not deliver a false hope. They deliver assurance and confidence and a certain hope.

I attended three funerals this past week. I have attended funerals where the last thing I heard was an uncertainty if promises made by the Triune God were true and turning the words of Jesus into promises into words that are up to you to decide if they were for you or not. At each funeral service I attended this week, the presiding preacher declared that those who were grieving would be comforted with the certain hope of the resurrection of their loved one. These preachers reminded each of us of when it was that the heavens were ripped wide open for each of those who had died in Christ. It was on each of their baptisms that the same Heavenly Father who only knew the exact timing of Christ's second return also declared a promise to each newly declared Child of God that nothing could separate them from the love that he had for them. Not their sin, because Jesus had nailed that to the cross. Not even their sleepiness, because Jesus stayed awake as he said he would as each of these children of God received their promised eternal rest.

We gather on this first Sunday in Advent as we begin a new church year, looking forward to what we know. We know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a manger, and we again look forward to hearing children telling us to Go tell this good news everywhere. We look forward to experiencing a live nativity reminding us that Jesus has already arrived. We look forward to receiving the body and blood of our Lord Jesus who was born, suffered for our sins and rose again to give us new life. And we look forward to the certain hope that Jesus will come again to take each of us home, just as he has promised. Amen