

Advent 2 Year B 2020
December 6, 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.” These words seem to ring especially true this year in the midst of the coronavirus. When it seems like we’ve been waiting nearly all year for this to be over, for a vaccine to come along, or for it to be exposed as a hoax, every day seems to drag on longer than the last. And at the same time, I’ve heard others express that they don’t know where all the time has gone. We had so many hopes and dreams and plans for 2020, and everything’s been cancelled. It seems as though these last nine months have simply ceased to exist because we couldn’t do the things that we had planned. “One day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”

Here it is, December, and we’re still waiting. There’s been news of vaccines, but even those will be slow to arrive, and some sources say that we still won’t be out of the woods right away, even with a vaccine. Just like back in March and April, we’re reminded that we’re in this for the long haul. Even with hope on the horizon, experts suggest that these next few months are going to be incredibly dark and difficult in our waiting. Hospitals are filling up, and even here in Hillsdale there are concerns about capacity. Michigan and other states are imposing stronger restrictions on businesses and gatherings, and tensions continue to rise over the economic situation that this causes. Some of the hardest times may still be yet to come. Even the seasons and cosmos echo this sentiment that things will get darker before the new day dawns. Every day brings us deeper into December, approaching the longest night of the year. A new year, with new hope is coming, but we still wait, as our world becomes darker still.

And this Advent season, we wait for the Lord; we wait for Christ to come at Christmas. Some have been so anxious for Christmas to come, that they brought out their Christmas trees right after Halloween. As many of you know, I come from the German tradition that observes the “hanging of the greens” on or around the beginning of Advent. Some even more traditional Germans wait until later in the season, or even until Christmas Eve to bring out their Christmas decorations. But this year, even some of my other traditional friends have brought out their decorations earlier than normal in anticipation and celebration. I think we are all so desperate for hope this year, that we need these tangible signs of hope for the changing seasons and the gift of the Christ child that comes to us at Christmas.

But still, we wait. Our reading from Second Peter tells us, “in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.” Not only can one day feel like a thousand years for us, but this is true for God. “One day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.” The coming of the Lord *is* approaching, Christ promises to come again. But God’s timeline throughout eternity, throughout all time and space, is vastly different from our understanding of time and our deepest desires for Christ to come quickly. The day of the Lord will come, but it will come “like a thief”—we do not know when, or how long we must wait.

And this can make it hard to have hope. When we don’t know how long we’ll have to wait, or how long until things will change, or when that new day will dawn, we can find ourselves stuck in doubt and uncertainty rather than hope. Yet it is precisely in these times that the prophet Isaiah proclaims comfort to the Israelites. “Comfort, O comfort my people ... Prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low.”

In these times of waiting, God calls us to prepare the way, to wait with faithfulness for the promised arrival of the Lord. And God promises us comfort in the midst of our waiting, because God's promises are sure. The Lord *will* come. The skies *will* grow brighter and a new day *will* dawn. We can be certain that even as we wait, there *is* hope for a future when God will bring justice, and peace, and joy to our world.

So, since for now, we are waiting, how *do* we prepare the way of the Lord? God calls us to a form of waiting that isn't just idle and passive. God calls us to actively wait; to engage in holy and faithful waiting. As we await and prepare for Christ's coming again, God calls us to share the good news right now. Like John the Baptist, we are called to cry out in the wilderness that Christ *is* coming, that God *is* present and active, and that there *is* reason for hope. We are called to proclaim that even as we wait, God is still at work. God calls us as we wait to work to bring about the coming kingdom: to strive for justice and peace, to speak up for those who have no voice, to care for those in need, to seek forgiveness and tear down the walls that divide us from our neighbors.

In the midst of the coronavirus, our faithful waiting also means taking actions that keep our loved ones and our neighbors safe and healthy. It means making difficult decisions, listening to science, changing plans, supporting those in need, and praying for all who are sick or grieving.

This is faithful and holy waiting, and this is *active* waiting. God has empowered us in our waiting to help bring comfort, healing, and justice to our world *right now*. As we faithfully wait for God's ultimate healing for our world, for Christ to come, and for the new day to dawn, we are called to proclaim the good news, and to serve our neighbors in need.

And as we wait, God promises to grant us comfort and peace. Even if our waiting seems to last for thousands of years, God is present, and Christ is coming. "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low." As we wait with hope and faithfulness for Christ to come, God continues to sustain us, strengthen us, and empower us. God is continuing to bring good news into the world even as we wait, and God is transforming the world through our hands.

What we do will not bring ultimate healing or comfort or peace or justice. That's God's job, and God will keep God's promises to the fullest in the fullness of time. But in the meantime, God invites us to prepare the way of the Lord by actively waiting. God invites us to participate in the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.