

Sermon for 29th November, 1st Sunday of Advent
(Isaiah 64:1-9), Mark 13:24-37
By Mary Yasini, Ordinand at Westcott House

Waiting can either be **exciting or dreadful**. It depends on what you're waiting for, how certain you are that it's going to happen, and how you spend the time waiting.

Think of a time when you were looking forward to something, perhaps seeing extended family members, going out for a meal, or going on holiday. You might spend the waiting period arranging details, bookings, and packing. **We're excited about these events!**

On the other hand, can you think of a time when you dreaded something? Maybe a bad winter, having a medical exam, or Monday mornings. You might dig out your thickest coat from the bottom of your wardrobe, flick through magazines in the waiting room, or drink lots of coffee, **but these are not things you look forward to.**

In all these examples, whether we're excited or dreading it, we're fairly certain that they are going to happen.

Today is the **first Sunday of Advent**. We begin a new year in the church calendar. However, the gospel reading from the lectionary takes us straight to the end times.

In the passage from Mark's gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that the **Son of Man WILL come** in clouds with great power and glory. And He **WILL** send His angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

But He also tells us that **no one knows** what day or hour He will return, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son know. Only the Father knows.

With this in mind, WE ARE CALLED TO WAIT.

But how do wait for Jesus' second coming while not knowing when that will be?

We are called to be hopeful, eager, and active in our waiting.

1. We are called to wait hopefully.

In Mark's passage we are assured of Jesus' return, as He tells us that **He WILL return, that He WILL gather us**, and that, no matter where we are, He will come and find us.

This is our hope. Here we have the promise of Christ's second coming, this promise gives us hope, **especially in light of the saving power of the cross.**

We don't know when he will return. We have no exact date when we will see Him in all His glory. But we do not need one. Sometimes we wish we could know the details of these things. Perhaps it would make our waiting easier if we could plan around it. To put it neatly in our 2020 planners. But "no one knows ... only the father".

We are not called to know but to hope.

For now, we see a glimpse of what's to come — we experience Christ in Word and Sacrament, in fellowship with other believers and in nature.

In the Advent of Jesus' first coming to the world, some might have missed it. **But no one will miss His second coming.** In His first coming, Jesus was born in a manger, the son of a carpenter.

In His second Advent, **all powers in the heavens will be shaken.**

When we confess our faith in the ecumenical creeds, we reaffirm this hope:

"He is seated at the right hand of the Father and He will come to judge the living and the dead".

We say this every day — or every week. Alongside our sisters and brothers across the world. These words are proclaimed in many tongues and many nations across the ages.

It is a prophetic enactment of that moment when every knee will bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We are hopeful because we are certain that our waiting won't be in vain. In light of Jesus' first coming, when Word became flesh, we now wait for His second coming. For a day when we will surely see Christ face to face.

2. With this certain hope, comes eager anticipation.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus speaks about the suffering and distress that will occur in the days leading up to His return. He uses old testament imagery of the sun darkening, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling from heaven.

This is not what we wait eagerly for, but these are images that speak of the fallen reality in which we live.

We live in difficult times, especially now; with a pandemic, climate change, systemic racism and so much more, it seems as if things are going from bad to worse. **Creation groans in labour pains**, while we wait for adoption and the redemption of our bodies.

It might seem like our sun, moon and stars are darkening, that light has left the world.

But amid of our anxieties and fears, Jesus commands us to **beware and keep alert**, to wait eagerly for the Advent of his return.

In the darkness, we are to wait, as in Him is light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

So, we are called to wait in the midst of suffering for the day when his light is revealed to the whole world. **We are called to wait and remember that these sufferings do not have the final word.**

We wait with eager anticipation because **the sufferings of our present time will be nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed to us** when we shall see Christ face to face.

3. We are lastly called to be active as we wait.

In the certain hope that we have in the promise of Jesus' return and in the power of the cross, we wait for a time in which the whole of creation will be renewed. **In this hope, we are called to be active participants.**

Many times, when we think of waiting, we think of passivity or apathy. But our waiting should not be apathetic or static. In today's passage, we are told that **we each have our work.** Once again, this is not something that should fill us dread, but rather with joy.

We are called to participate in God's work as Jesus has commissioned us to proclaim the Advent of His return in light of the cross.

We have been tasked, each of us, with doing our work here on earth until His return. **We are called to actively pray, to be watchful and to be prepared.**

This gives us the great task of living every day for Him, whatever it is we do, and of being ready at any moment to meet Him face to face.

Jesus' second coming is not the cosmic equivalent to having a medical examination on a Monday morning during a bad snowstorm. Because we know that **He WILL return and that He WILL gather us,** from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Then, He will **wipe every tear from our eyes.** Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the old things have passed away.

Jesus' return is a promise. It is a call to wait, it is a call for us to be active and expectant, and to be hopeful, in spite of the pain we see today and in spite of the uncertainty.

In this way, **our life becomes a preparation to meet the King** who reigns in our hearts and whose kingdom will have no end. Amen.