

Intro:

Have you ever walked into a room and forgot why you were going there? It happens to me all the time. When I am particularly busy or distracted, I will be on a straight path for the end of my errand, and then arrive and have no idea what to do when I get there. It happened just last week, as we were packing the car to go see family for Thanksgiving. Lots of details and bags are required for travelling with tiny humans, and it kind of feels like we are moving our entire house simply to go for an overnight stay. Well as I was packing the car, I would pick up one bag, notice that it was missing an item, go to the place to retrieve the item, forgot what items I was coming to get, then leave the bag in the room, only to discover it when I go back for another item that I inevitably forgot. Now I realize that Meghan and I are in a particular season of baby life in which sleep is a fine commodity, but sadly, this isn't just a sleep-deprived reaction to life. This is many of my waking hours, standing in the middle of a room trying to do one thing and then getting distracted by another thing and then stopping that second task to brainstorm about this third task that I'm really excited about. In this holiday season of parties and school functions and gatherings of friends and family, there can be lots to be distracted by can take our attention away from the task at hand, and leave standing in the middle of the living room asking "What am I doing here, again?"

This week begins our 4 weeks of Advent as we prepare, wait, hope for Jesus to show up at just the right time. Advent is a season in the church designed to help us collectively practice together the discipline of waiting on God, earnestly praying/hoping/believing that God is doing something, even while we're just looking at the horizon worried about the next wave

coming in. We're calling this series "Wait Training" (no, nothing about diets or exercise right now. We mean WAIT, like sit around twiddling your thumbs just anticipating what's next, training.) because let's be honest, we all need a little training in how to wait well. You'll notice the most prevalent seasons in the church, Advent leading up to Christmas, and Lent leading up to Easter, are ones that push us to practice stuff that's hard for humans, particularly, the call of waiting and watching.

Pray

So let me ask you a question-- how much time do you spend looking at a phone screen? I have a function on my phone called Screen Time and I get a report every Sunday about my screen time and each week I am appalled. Like I don't need that right now, ok? But maybe it isn't a cell phone for you, its a television. Maybe you are like me and have turned the TV on not to watch anything in particular but it is constantly going in the background, not my main focus, but always present to demand my attention. Many people I love turn on a favorite news channel when they wake up and it becomes their constant companion throughout the day. Or maybe its not TV for you, but there is a favorite author that gets most of your brain space. Or, maybe this time of year, all your time and energy are focused on buying things and getting everything just right. My real question is: who or what captures your primary attention?

In this week's gospel lesson, we learn from Jesus that there are lots of things that will vie for our attention, and that this is nothing new. Somebody is always selling something. There will always be voices that

tell us that we need them or their patented solution in order to make it through for one more day. I think the Message translation heading gets us to a bit more the point that Jesus is making. It says "Beware of Doomsday Deceivers!" The folks that say "The End is Near, and for 3 easy payments of 39.95, I have the solution for you!" Jesus is showing us that there are those that will try and rile us up about all that is wrong with the world. Why we need to panic, to fear, to distrust our neighbor and close in on ourself. To literally bunker ourselves in and batten down the hatches. To be clear, Jesus is not saying that the end isn't a reality. He reminds us in verse 27 "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

There will come a day when Christ returns. Jesus is asking us "What are you doing to prepare your hearts and minds for that day? Rather than a spirit of fear or scarcity, Jesus is inviting us into a posture of peace and patience, knowing That God will keep God's promises.

One thing we can discern from this scripture is that if you are no good at waiting, then you are not alone. The people of God have always been bad at waiting, its kind of our thing.

You see, Israel was promised one who would deliver them. A messiah, one who would make it all better, and they were told that "in the days to come", one is coming who will save us. Well, unfortunately for the people of Israel, there was no time or date mentions by these prophets, and so the people waited, and waited and waited. And they got impatient. I can imagine that any time some charismatic leader came up into power in

Israel, the people were like “Is this him? Is this the savior?” But it wasn’t. They wanted power and might, destruction of enemies and vengeance. In short, they wanted God, but they wanted God on their terms. And still they waited.

Finally, when Jesus did finally show up, they didn’t believe it. They had so carefully crafted their own version of what God OUGHT to BE that when God was in their midst they missed it. **And the same is true for us.**

We get so busy and consumed with the anxieties of life and the things that we need to do to get ready for God, that we can often miss God right in front of us. lots of times we walk through life like folks kn a NYC sidewalk. Everywhere we go, another news station, politician or loud voice tries to hand us another flyer and we just keep grabbing them. After a while, your hands are so full of what everyone else has told you to carry/worry about/be hateful about/fight about that you don’t have energy to Carry or be concerned about anything else.

The Message version of Luke 34-36 is especially pointed for us today.

“But be on your guard. Don’t let the sharp edge of your expectation get dulled by parties and drinking and shopping. Otherwise, that Day is going to take you by complete surprise, spring on you suddenly like a trap, for it’s going to come on everyone, everywhere, at once. So, whatever you do, don’t fall asleep at the wheel. Pray constantly that you will have the strength and wits to make it through everything that’s coming and end up on your feet before the Son of Man.”

Now this can feel like, as one commentator shared— quite a Christmas killjoy. ‘don’t get distracted by parties’ during the most party-filled time of the year. Certainly, Jesus can’t mean that we all should just sit around silently with our eyes to the sky! He gave us lots of work to do and stories to share in the gospels. So what is this passage about?

Well Perhaps if we look at another translation, we can glean a fuller understanding of what is going on here. Instead of parties, the NRSV uses the word dissipation.

There is a principle in thermodynamics called dissipation. Dissipation means the movement of energy from one source to another, resulting in less energy in the second place. It literally means losing energy for no good reason. The loss of momentum or power to a useless endeavor. For us this might mean messed up priorities, scattering our attention everywhere and consequently nowhere, wasting time and breath on the stuff that isn’t Christ’s voice, losing energy and momentum in ability to press on towards Christ.

The NSRV and NIV also use the word Drunkenness. not just the physical state of drunkenness although that is certainly a distraction. It’s the state of altering our minds so we can avoid the bad feelings we’d rather not deal with. It is a form of (Avoidance). Intoxicating ourselves with the things that can distract us from our feelings, our hopes, our fears, and our dreams.

Worries of this life/anxieties of life: literally the weight of every day can weigh us down so much that our eyes are not looking out for the kingdom— for Christ's in breaking— for our redemption to come. This feels real to me. I am so consumed by schedules and fitting one more thing into my day that I lose sight of what my priorities were in the first place. I think of the man who wants so hard to provide a good life for his family that he gets consumed with work and works long hours to earn a living and he never spends any time with his family. Its painfully ironic, and yet it is speaks such truth to our daily grind as humanity. We're so worried about making it to tomorrow that we can miss that Christ has promised us that we don't have to worry about tomorrow because tomorrow takes care of itself.

Jesus invites us into this life of patient expectation. Of waiting for God's promises to be revealed and not to flutter away on the empty promises of this world. Be ready, Jesus says. And the way to do that is to always be discerning the truth... have your hearts and minds set on the Kingdom, not getting distracted, wasting time and energy, avoiding the stuff we don't want to feel.

But again, we live into our heritage as the people of God who are not good at this.

We ask questions, good questions like How do we wait for Christ's return? How do we wait for God to show up in the most difficult circumstances of our lives?

We need help, training, a regimen and routine of practices that help us cultivate this patient expectation better.

Luckily we have Advent. We celebrate Advent every year not because we have mastered it and our celebrating our ability to wait well. Not at all. Rather, we incorporate Advent into our life every year as a reminder that we need to always learn how to wait well. Advent is our workout partner, who encourages us in the difficult times when we want to give up. Advent is allowing us to train in waiting. To build the muscles back that have atrophied throughout the year. To be intentional about where we are and the work we need to do.

We are training every year in waiting well, and this week we are invited to wait well by discerning the truth.

We are invited to be people who don't just waste out time and energy on fruitless things.

We are invited to be people who don't just let every voice here and there have space in our minds.

We are invited to turn our hearts and minds to what is most important: the kingdom of God.

For certain, There will be much to panic about, much to fight about over the Christmas table, much to get distracted by, and when things get tough, there will be a temptation to just numb away what doesn't feel good, but we are invited this aren't to be alert and to discern where to spend our time, energy, priorities with clear eyes and a heart turned toward Christ.

Our invitation today is to be the people who so want to see Christ and hear the truth, that we are intentional about blocking out the distractions and showing up fully in our desire to wait, to wait for God on God's own terms. As we begin this advent journey, may you find God in the waiting, may you cultivate those still quiet spaces in the midst of a chaotic time in our world and culture. And in these spaces, I pray that we would be able to hear God's voice. And on the journey, and in the quiet, and in the midst of chaos, may we find peace.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.