

Sermon Title: Enough Already

Text: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:3-7, 17-19; Mark 13:24-37

By: Rev. Terry Carty

Date: 11-27-11

Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church

Season: 1st Sunday in Advent

Main Point: In this season of waiting, we can consider what are we waiting for and what are we doing in the meantime. We are less impatient with the waiting when we are prepared with something to do - practice living the way of Christ.

-----

I'm just tired of waiting. The politicians tell us to wait until the elections and they will get it all right. The financial experts tell us to wait, the economy will turn around. The boss tells us to wait, maybe next year we will get a raise. The parents tell us to wait, Christmas will be here soon. The preacher tells us to wait, Advent is about waiting.

Enough already! I'm tired of waiting. I think its time for something to happen!

That is the way Isaiah was feeling when he said [paraphrase] "LORD; if only you would rip the sky open and come on down!" Enough already! Things can't get much worse. And we know that you have the answer in your perfect kingdom. You are the potter and we are all clay. Just make it happen!



Today marks the beginning of Advent - possibly the church season most difficult to understand. It is the first season of the church year. Why don't we open the church year with Christmas? Baby born...angels sing...wise men worship...grows in wisdom...

Well, it just doesn't go that way. The way it goes is that generation after generation has been born into a promise of a coming kingdom. And every time we think that we see the signs of that promise coming into fullness throughout the heavens and earth, we are told to wait for it. Just read the Old Testament - it describes people going through that cycle over and over again. But the work of the prophets was to keep HOPE alive.



N.T. Wright in his book, *Surprised by Hope*, suggests that the relevant questions of our waiting would be:

"What are we waiting for?"

and "What are we doing in the meantime?"

So, what ARE we waiting for? What do we think God is going to do? We usually are confounded by the difference between what we would like God to do and what we often experience God doing in reality. You can hear this tension in the reading from Isaiah.

The church year starts with waiting because we live in that tension between what we want God to do and what God really is doing. This is not an easy answer. The whole study of theology is based upon trying to figure out what God is really doing. The essence of Christian HOPE is that we will become the people who want what God is doing.



The second question of “What are we doing in the meantime?” has everything to do with the rest of the year. I have sat with a number of people while they waited for a loved one in surgery. Some nervously talk about anything but the surgery - they avoid the things they worry about. Some thumb through magazines or newspapers - probably trying to find something that will occupy their time. Some get lost in a novel. Some calmly knit or do needlework. Some organize their calendar. Waiting is never easy. Some people are prepared for what they will do while they wait and others are not. It seems that often the people who are prepared for the waiting are the ones who are not frustrated as much by their impatience.

I think that Jesus came to help us understand what God is actually doing AND to give us something to work on while we wait. The very image of Christ helps us to see the true nature of God AND models the way citizens of God’s kingdom live. Our preparation for the waiting is to practice the graces needed to live in God’s kingdom.

Those practices lead to disciplined living. If we focus more on how we are living than on when God is going to finish whatever God is working on, then our waiting takes on meaning. The practices that Jesus taught are prayer, the love of others different from ones self, finding the good in everything, simple living, seeking God’s will in everything.



And so, Advent is not just a repetition of the same thing year after year. It is the time to annually evaluate where we are in our journey toward being the person who wants what God is doing. And it is a time to prepare for the waiting by focusing on new practices that take our mind of the waiting.

Do you think that you can manage to set aside some time during this busy season to consider what you are doing in the meantime? Let’s not just rush to the manger this year. Let’s each work on practicing life the way Christ taught it - doing things God’s way.