

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Mark 13:33-37

Waiting is not something we are good at in our culture today.

We pay our bills over the phone, and do our banking on the internet.

In our Gospel reading for today we hear Jesus talking about waiting. He tells a parable about a man who goes on a journey.

He doesn't tell his servants where he is going, or when he will come home again. He leaves his servants in charge of his home and property, and gives them work to do while he is away. He then leaves, and his last word to his servants is to be diligent and ready for his return, whenever that might be.

This is like parents who leave their teenage children at home to look after the house, giving them instructions on what to do while they are away. If they take seriously the instructions that were given, then they will do your best to carry them out. After all, their parents could come home at any time. It would be too late when they are walking in the door.

Jesus' parable tells us to watch and be ready, while at the same time reminding us that we have work to do while he is away.

We are in the time between Jesus' first and second comings, and Jesus has told us to watch and wait, doing the work he has given us to do in our Gospel reading from last week. As we do unto others as he did unto us; when we give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, give clothes to the poor and visit those who are sick or in jail; as we make disciples of all nations, we are working and waiting for Christ's return.

Now, there are two kinds of waiting - passive waiting and active waiting. We can choose to wait passively, like sitting in a waiting room at the doctor's office, flicking through magazines, day dreaming a bit, just filling in time until we are called in to see the doctor. This kind of passive waiting doesn't require much energy or attention. It requires no commitment on our part. If God wants us, he is all-knowing and he knows where to find us. In the meantime we deal with our own concerns, and look after our own need for leisure. There is no need to bother about prayer, worship, mission, the Bible, or with deliberately living the Christian life.

Or, we can wait with eager expectation. This waiting involves prayer, worship, mission, the Bible, and deliberately living the Christian life, going out of our way to serve others, and not just looking after our own needs. We know that Jesus will return, and like the servant in the parable, his absence doesn't mean forgetting about the master and what he wants us to do, but to actively wait and be prepared for whenever that moment of his arrival might be.

If we don't believe that Jesus will return, then it doesn't matter what we do, but if we do believe that Jesus will keep his word, and come again, then we need to examine just how active we have been while we are waiting.

The work of the kingdom of God, the work of the Master, has been entrusted to us, his servants, and he expects us to be faithful servants. There is little point in worrying and fretting over when the master will return. The most important concern we have is that we faithfully carry out the work he has given us to do, so that when he does return, he will find us faithfully working at those things he has given us to. Like the parents who trust their teenagers to look after the house while they are away,

Jesus trusts us to carry out his work until he returns.

Advent is the season of the church year when we consider how well we are actively waiting for the return of Jesus. This is a good time to ask ourselves questions like: How seriously have we taken the fact that Jesus died and rose for us? How well have we been actively waiting, or have we become disinterested and distant from God and his church? Have we been half-hearted and lukewarm about living the life that God wants for us, or have we just done what pleases us, or followed the crowd?

Have we been content to say a prayer every now and then when we think of it? How well, and how often have we worshipped God, or has it become a matter of boring routine? Have we been going about our daily activities without any reference to God, or giving any thought to his presence?

There is not one person who can say that all this kind of stuff is not important. One day Jesus will return, and he will want to know what kind of a Christian we have been. For those who trust and have faith in him, he will welcome into eternal life, because his death has paid for all our sin.

We spend a lot of time waiting, but there is nothing more important to wait for than the return of the Master. What we do while we are waiting is also important, are we waiting like the person at the doctor's office just filling in time, or are we waiting with eager expectation deliberately living the Christian life, going out of our way to serve others, and not just looking after our own needs?

My friends, Jesus is coming. Lord Jesus, come soon.

AMEN.