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13:24-37

Advent 1-B

Isaiah 64:1-9 and Mark

Fullness of Time series: "Waiting and Ready"

See if you can guess: what do all of these people have in common?

- kids eager for Christmas presents
- a first-time mom 8-1/2 months pregnant
- people with packages at the post office
- customers at the DMV
- folks in the Chik-fil-A drive-thru line
- people checking their phones for their COVID test results
- grandparents missing their out-of-state grandkids during the past 8 months
- crowds in the TSA lines at the airport
- Detroit Lions football fans
- NC State football fans

What is it that all of these people are doing? They're waiting, right? They're all people who are waiting. Waiting for special holidays, waiting in lines at busy establishments, waiting for health reports, waiting decades for our favorite teams to have a really good season, waiting for the pandemic to vanish. We all do a lot of waiting in this life, don't we?

Let me add one more group to my list of waiting people: followers of Jesus eager to see him face-to-face. I'm one of those waiting people. How about you? Jesus promised he's coming back; but we don't know when. So we have to wait, don't we? A huge part of the Christian life is waiting. We're waiting for Christ to return. We're waiting for his promise to come back, and to take us to heaven. We're waiting for the day when we'll be free from all the sickness, sorrow, sin, death, and hardships of this world.

Jesus wants his followers to be people who are waiting. Not that we're supposed to sit around all day, ignoring the world around us, with our necks always tilted up looking to see if Jesus is coming back now ... or now ... or now. Jesus expects us to live normal lives in this world, to be active participants in the culture around us. But he also wants us to live with expectancy. He wants us to be people who believe that he will return, people who understand that he is near, and people who get it that his return has tremendous importance and meaning for us.

Here's the thing, though. Waiting for Jesus gets shoved aside. Every day a million things distract us, sidetrack us, demand our full attention. We're bombarded with media, technology, cultural shifts, family responsibilities, job pressures, health concerns, political turmoil, fashion trends, leisure pursuits, along with a hundred different selfish and sinful concerns every day. It's easy to just skip the waiting stuff, as Christians. It's easier be people who are not really waiting for Jesus, people whose only real thoughts are for the things of this world.

Jesus wants his followers to be people who are living in the real world, carrying on his mission in our communities, living out our faith in our families and neighborhoods, but at the same time waiting for his blessed return.

God's people have always been people who are waiting. In the Old Testament centuries, God's people of faith waited for his appearances, waited for his deliverance and rescue, waited for his long-promised Messiah to come. And then, as our sermon series theme verse puts it, "*... when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law*" (*Galatians 4:4*). Jesus came, and the people of God were

waiting no more. The Son of God became incarnate, taking on our human flesh. He lived and walked among us, true God and true man in one person. The Lord shared all our human temptations and trials; but he never sinned. And, in the end, Jesus gave his perfect life on the cross, redeeming us, buying us back by his sacrifice for us.

Now, we're in another time period of waiting, as people of faith. Our Savior has risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven; but he has commissioned his Church on earth to carry on his ministry. God wants all people to be saved, and so he is giving us this time: to spread the Word, witness to our Lord, baptize, teach, confirm, make disciples, and share the amazing Good News of a Savior who has come and promises to come back again.

Christ wants us to be people who are waiting for him. He wants waiting to be a significant, important part of your Christian living, and mine. He wants us not to get so distracted and flustered by everything else that's coming at us this week that we forget that Jesus is coming.

The Lord wants us waiting, and he wants us ready. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus says, "Watch, be on guard. Wake up, stay alert." He gives us the signs of his second coming in Mark chapter 13; and they've all been fulfilled. "The day is coming, and no one knows when that time will come," says the Lord. It could come at any time. It could be tomorrow. It could be today.

Are you ready? If suddenly today Christ returns in glory, if the world comes to an end, if you stand before the judgment throne of God this very day, will you be ready?

I'm not asking you if you have every single part of your life in perfect order, with all your ducks in a row, with nothing at all

to feel guilty about or to be ashamed of. None of us could ever claim that, could we? We all take missteps, think shameful thoughts, speak regrettable words. I couldn't stand before God and claim to be deserving and worthy of his favor. Could you?

So none of us can ever make ourselves ready. But to be truly ready is to turn to God. First, be fully honest with God. Admit your sin. Confess your failings. God already knows, but he wants for you to be honest about your spiritual condition. Say with Isaiah the prophet, from our Old Testament lesson today, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." First, be fully honest with God.

And, second, be fully reliant on God. Throw yourself on his mercy every day, and trust in his grace alone every day. Look to the cross every day, and know that your only hope, your one salvation, is there, in Jesus Christ. Be fully reliant on God, not yourself, when it comes to your life in this world, and in the next. Say with Isaiah the prophet, "O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand."

We'll talk more in our Advent sermon series about the coming of Christ at the first Christmas, and about his Second Coming someday. In the meantime, Jesus wants us to be people who are waiting ... waiting and ready. Lord Jesus, we wait for you eagerly. Make us ready, by your grace. Amen.