Advent 1 (Year A) 2023

Mark 13:24-27

Christ Lutheran Church – Zionsville

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I have always had a strained relationship with Black Friday. On the one hand it bothers me to the core that we live in such materialistic world, yet on the other hand… well those materials tend to fill up space in our lives.  
  
In thinking back to my youth, I remember Black Friday as being a momentous occasion. Not only did you need to know what you wanted to buy, you needed to find the coupons - *there were no online deals yet*. On top of that you had a make sure you have the correct directions to the store you want to go to - *there was no GPS or at least good GPS*. Then, once you arrived at any given store there was a sense of anticipation. There’s a lot of people here…will I get to the object first? Would it still be on the shelf? All the preparation all of the waiting - now it’s go time! Good memories.   
  
Obviously, Black Friday is not religious, at least in a strict sense. But Black Friday has religious elements. We wouldn’t call it a congregation, but on **Bl**ack Friday countless people all come together (they *assemble* – remember the Greek?) in places for a common purpose. Whether we would like to admit it or not the day is spent worshiping. It is spent worshiping the God of consuming and profit – *things..*. And all of that’s to ignore the ritual elements or at least the most important one – *I’ll take a large caramel macchiato – skim milk – half sweet – no cream please.*

I joke – but the day and all of its trappings hold an odd sway over many people – myself included.    
  
Today I submit to you that Black Friday and Advent perfectly illustrate the struggle of the season.   
  
All of this was sparked because of an article I saw.

The article talked about how this year’s black Friday was unusually subdued. There could be many reasons for this – Now there’s *what I think*. And then there’s *what I hope*.   
  
I think Black Friday was more subdued this year because everyone can get what they want in September, October, and November – never mind the other 9 months of the year. But don’t take my word for it, that’s from an economist.   
  
Here’s what I hope. Perhaps we are witnessing a shift – albeit a subtle shift - in our culture. Could it be that our culture has finally burned itself out on the concept of instant gratification? Have we finally come to the conclusion that waiting is not only healthy but good for our souls.

As we begin the profound journey of Advent, and its discipline of patience in our waiting for Jesus, let us deepen our understanding and reflection on this two-fold waiting.

The discipline of patience in Advent extends far beyond the mere passage of time. It’s a call to immerse ourselves in the richness of the waiting—waiting not merely as a countdown but as a sacred space for spiritual growth and transformation.

Our scriptures reveal glimpses of this anticipation and waiting. The passage from Mark 13:24-27 portrays a scene of cosmic upheaval, heralding the return of the Son of Man in glory. It paints a picture of celestial wonders—a symbolic language that speaks to the urgency and anticipation of Jesus' return.

Yet, amidst this urgency, the Advent season invites us to pause and reflect on the significance of Jesus' birth. The miracle of the Incarnation, where God humbled Himself to dwell among us, is a cornerstone of our faith. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem embodies hope, love, and the promise of redemption—a profound reality that shapes our lives.

For some waiting is passive, and for others its active.

A girl who waits on a street corner waiting for the bus to arrive will experience one kind of waiting, a passive waiting. That same girl on the same corner hearing the sound of a parade that is just out of sight will also wait, but it will be a different kind of waiting, full of expectation, a waiting on tiptoe, an active waiting.

A fisherman finds it burdensome to wait for spring to arrive because it is a passive waiting. Once he is fishing, however, he done not find it a burden to wait for the trout to rise to his fly because it is an active kind of waiting, full of expectation. All at once the fisherman is injected with an active sense of anticipation because he never knows when the trout may appear.

This is the kind of active waiting Jesus had in mind when he says: *Beware, keep alert: for you do not know when the time will come!*

Our waiting, therefore, is not a passive idleness but an active participation in the unfolding narrative of God’s plan. *We wait, not in despair, but in hope*. The anticipation of Jesus' second coming is intertwined with the joy of His first arrival—a paradox that enriches our faith journey.

It helps us to see that ways in which Jesus *is already* at work in the world and in our lives. This paradox rouses us to attention, in that, we no longer need to wait for forgiveness, we no longer need to wait on serving others as Christ served – we no longer need to wait because – well – Christ has already been born – our sins are already forgiven.

Consider the discipline of waiting in our daily lives. Just as a farmer sows seeds and patiently waits for the harvest, our waiting for Jesus involves cultivation and growth. It’s in this waiting that our faith takes root, our character is refined, and our relationship with God deepens.

Speaking of waiting - What if we were to live our lives as if Christ were literally coming on Christmas Eve. How would we celebrate? What types of gifts would we give our King? How would we give an account of our ministry to His Word? What would make Jesus say, *now I’ve seen everything?* You know, the thing is, we’ve been given the tools to do this – our Lord simply asks us to use the gifts we’ve been given. We don’t need to solve world hunger to make a difference, we simply need to make ***a***difference.

The waiting for Jesus, both in His birth and His return, beckons us to embody virtues of endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness. It's a waiting that demands our active participation—a waiting filled with prayers, acts of love, and a commitment to justice and righteousness.

As we navigate the Advent season, let us not succumb to the distractions that lure us away from the essence of waiting. Instead, let us carve out moments of stillness, allowing the quietude to deepen our connection with God. Let us engage in spiritual practices that nourish our souls—prayer, meditation, acts of compassion, and contemplation of God’s Word.

In the modern world, where instant gratification often reigns supreme, the Advent discipline of patience stands as a countercultural practice. It challenges us to resist the temptation of immediacy and embrace the sacredness of waiting. It’s an invitation to shift our perspective—from hurriedness to mindfulness, from restlessness to contentment.

Furthermore, our waiting for Jesus is not solitary; it's communal. Just as Black Friday gathers multitudes with a shared purpose, our waiting for Jesus unites us as a community of believers. Together, we await the fulfillment of God’s promises, supporting and encouraging one another in faith.

The discipline of patience in Advent encompasses the beauty of the already and the not yet. It’s a journey where we celebrate Jesus' birth and eagerly anticipate His return. Our waiting is purposeful—it shapes us, transforms us, and draws us closer to God.

May this season of Advent be a time of introspection, a time of embracing the paradox of waiting with joy and hope. May our hearts be filled with the assurance that our waiting is not in vain, but it’s an integral part of our faith journey.

Let us continue to walk this path of patience, knowing that as we wait for Jesus, we are being transformed into the very people God calls us to be. And may our waiting be a testimony of our faith, a testament to our hope, and a reflection of our love for the One who was, who is, and who is to come.

Amen.