

Advent Expectations

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last Friday, John, Benjamin, and I drove home to Pennsylvania for the weekend. John left work early on Friday so we could get home before 10 or 11 p.m. like we do when he works. We had expectations of getting home to spend a little extra time with our niece and nephew. About two hours into our drive we realized that our expectations for the evening needed to change. We were just below York on 83 north when it started to snow. The snow caused many accidents which in turn closed 83 for 3 plus hours. So we sat patiently and listened to the radio until we began moving again. In the waiting for traffic to move I couldn't help but be reminded of the texts for today.

The texts for today are probably ones that we don't expect to hear on the first Sunday of Advent. . All of our texts for today remind us that the season of Advent has a different set of expectations.

The texts from Isaiah and Psalms show us people at the end of their rope. They are ready to give up and then they decide to turn to God.

Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians that Jesus is the foundation for the community, not wise teachers and eloquent speakers.

Finally, Jesus talks about end times. He reminds us that there is hope in his coming, but we don't know when that will be – just that it will be at an unexpected hour. Jesus also challenges us to be awake and ready.

The texts aren't in line with what we hear and see when we journey outside of our homes or browse the internet. The world around us seems to be in the full swing

anticipating Christmas. Everywhere we go we are reminded of the consumer reality of Christmas. People are talking about getting together with family, buying gifts for relatives and friends, or getting ready for the office Christmas party. Businesses are hoping to make profits. It seems that we all have many expectations.

Advent's expectations are very different than the world in which we live. It is almost as if we need to start where there is discomfort, suffering, and despair, and talk of end times to realize the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

Advent is the time when we need to pause from the world around us and turn back to God. Our expectations should change from trying to find the perfect gift to God. In the midst of the busyness that surrounds us – from shopping, to parties, and family gatherings, we need to pause and acknowledge that Christ is our hope.

To elaborate a little more on the Corinthians text, Paul was trying to help a community that was highly dysfunctional. There were so many divisions in the Corinthian community that he needed to be tactful in how he addressed them. Paul begins in the Thanksgiving portion of his letter which is our second reading for today. In this small part of the letter we can already see some of the things that Paul is going to address. The main point that Paul makes is that the community has been given everything that they have from God in Christ Jesus. Jesus is the main emphasis in the letter.

Paul was trying to remind the Corinthians that Jesus is the one who gives us hope. Through Christ we have everything we need. We don't need to have all of the knowledge, which would have been countercultural during his lifetime. In Paul's day, he was surrounded by many Philosophers. Students would have a teacher and they would "belong" to that teachers' group. The Corinthians started to do the same thing. They wanted to be part of Paul's group or Apollo's group. Paul

reminds them that Christ is what unifies them. It doesn't matter who teaches them. It is God through Christ Jesus who calls us into fellowship.

During this advent season, we should pause and reflect on the communities that we are a part of. What is the reason for the community? The reason for the community here at Saint Nicholas is Jesus Christ. We have hope in that. Jesus is our center. We have the opportunity to turn back to God and recognize the gifts that we are given. We have the time to reflect and know that the Christ child's birth that we anticipate gives us hope. Paul reminds us of what God has done, is doing, and will do among us.

In our gospel text Jesus challenges us to stay alert. We don't know when the end is coming, but as we wait, we shouldn't be idle. Jesus challenges us to do God's work in this world. As a community, now is not the time to disappear into the world around us by forgetting that Christ is the perfect gift, full of hope – but rather it is a time to turn back to God and recognize our mission as a community to

our world. We don't know when Jesus is coming back, but he challenges us to be ready.

Brian Petersen writes in New Proclamation that, "This is not the time to hide or become lazy and complacent, because God is bringing the world to its goal, and God calls the church into that mission. Rather than giving a timetable, verse 30 gives prophetic encouragement for 'this generation' not to assume that the task of witness can be done by others or at some other time."

We are all part of 'this generation'. We are all part of the body of Christ, the family of God. We have a responsibility during advent as we anticipate Christ's birth. In the midst of the holiday spirit that surrounds us, we need to pause, to turn back to God, and do God's work as we have hope in the coming of the Christ child.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.

