



**The ABC's of Advent: Anticipation –
What are you waiting for??
Nov. 28, 2010**

Guide our feet, O Lord, into the ways of peace. Amen.

A recent television commercial for a national card chain had a child excitedly and eagerly counting down the days, hours, and minutes until Christmas. Everywhere the child went, she would rattle off the latest count. While the commercial is a tad on the annoying side, it does carry with it the sense of anticipation that builds this time of the year.

Our schedules become fuller with holiday errands, and visiting family and friends. The anticipation can turn into a frenzy with a heightened awareness of time running out, of there being so few shopping days until December 25th. Anticipation may also combine with gratitude and relief that another calendar year is almost over, and the hope that 2011 will be a better year.

Anticipation can be defined as providing for beforehand. It can also be defined as looking forward to something. Anticipation can be a mixture of waiting. Not knowing when or where something will happen can be exciting and energizing. Yet expecting that which is unknown or unexpected can make us nervous.

Several years ago, there was a television commercial for ketchup. While the camera focused on the ketchup coming out of the bottle, the plaintive voice of Carly Simon sang, “Anticipation, it’s making me wait.” The message of the commercial was that good ketchup was well worth waiting for – even if it meant one’s hamburger grew cold!

It is this theme of waiting, albeit not for ketchup, and the anticipation of waiting that are the themes in our texts today. This theme of waiting is not only common in the Advent season, but throughout the Scriptures. There is a sense of watching, waiting, expecting, sometimes more patiently than other times for the reign of Christ to come.

Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets foretold a day when the Son of Man would appear. What a day of rejoicing that would be. The exact day, hour, minute no one knew. Regardless, it was still a day one needed to be ready for.

When Israel was in exile, Isaiah frequently spoke a word of encouragement and hope to a nation that had lost its way. They had strayed from God's paths. Isaiah longed for – waited for the day when the Messiah would come. In that day, swords would be turned into plowshares, war would be no more, hunger would be no more. Isaiah did not know when this day would be. Because he did not know, some who heard his message of assurance, hope, and peace may have laughed at him. They may even have called him crazy for hoping in something that did not seem to be true. Yet in the midst of adversity, in the midst of ridicule, Isaiah held onto hope that the King would come when morning dawns, and light triumphant breaks. Isaiah held hope that in the promise of salvation he proclaimed, was the assurance God would one day reign in peace.

Whenever we go away on vacation, there is much anticipation. This anticipation lies in what needs to be done prior to leaving, as well as what will happen while on vacation. The same anticipation holds true for the Psalmist.

Psalms 120-134 are part of a group of psalms known as "songs of ascents". To travel to Jerusalem meant to travel over mountains. Jerusalem as a city offered a sense of security within its walls. It had the ability to bring people together from all walks of life. Yet for as much as the city brings people together, Jerusalem is a city where three major religions of the world continue to fight over the city. We pray for – and anticipate peace within Jerusalem.

Paul's sense of anticipation was different than the Psalmist's. Paul thought and believed Christ's coming would be soon. Paul anticipated a new day, a new reality of Christ's coming. This understanding was a new sense of time. Even though each of us have twenty-four hours in a day, we still get caught up in our understanding of time. We can be amazed that it goes quicker than we sometimes do! Yet Paul reminds his hearers – and us – that the time of Christ is different. Good and evil co-exist side by side together. As they exist, the reign of Christ comes – breaking through the darkness of evil. The reign of Christ continues to break through goodness and evil today.

It is this anticipation that Matthew builds on. A sense of being prepared, being ready. In being ready, also not knowing when the reign of Christ will break into our lives. For Matthew, anticipation was a matter of two elements. The first is uncertainty as to the time of the Lord's coming. Second, in this uncertainty, how we as Christians are to behave.

We are to be awake, alert, watchful – at all times. For example, when I am eagerly and excitedly anticipating something HUGE, I cannot sleep. I rest, but sleep does not come easily. I may roll over and look at the clock, only to be surprised that time seems to stand still. When the new day comes, I am excited, yet tired. It is this anticipation and watchfulness that our texts proclaim – a watchfulness of looking forward, expecting, being ready, waiting, and hopeful.

This is also the anticipation and watchfulness the church celebrates during the season of Advent. It is anticipation that keeps us awake, alert, and excited. It is anticipation that looks ahead in wonder to the reign of Christ: that time when war will be no more, when families will no longer be divided, when swords and spears will be turned into tools to farm the land, and a time when farming the land will lead all who are hungry to be fed. It will also be a time when those who are poor will be made rich. The ultimate reality with the reign of Christ coming is that life as we know it will be radically turned upside down by Christ's coming!

At the same time, we anticipate Christ breaking into our lives here and now. My hope and my prayer for you this week, is that you take time to pay attention to the ways you are anticipating Christ's coming. This attention is not the busy-ness of the season. Rather, the anticipation lies in those moments of being watchful, ready, and waiting. Like a child waiting for Christmas morning, we ask, "is it Christmas yet?" No, but in the meantime, we remain awake and alert, anticipating the reign of Christ here in our midst. We are reminded also of the words from the children's sermon, "He came down that we might have love, Alleluia, forevermore!"

One of my favorite movies/plays is "Fiddler on the Roof". The play is about life in a Jewish village in Russia at the turn of the century. At the end of the play, as the villagers are forced to leave their tiny village of Anatevka, a villager asks the rabbi whether or not this would be a good time to wait for the Messiah. With wisdom, the rabbi responds, "We will have to wait for him someplace else."

Dear friends in Christ, in this time of anticipation and waiting, may we remain awake and alert for the coming of the Lord!