



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***"A Waiting that Awakens" - The First Sunday of Advent - 11/29/2020***

Today marks the beginning of Advent, the four-week season before Christmas characterized by themes of waiting in hopeful anticipation for the coming of Christ. Not just the birth of Christ, mind you, but for all the ways that Christ breaks into our world, a second time again and again. For many, Advent is a much needed opportunity to slow down and take a break from the frantic pace of our life and to try on the spiritual virtue of waiting.

And I don't think I'm going out on a limb here to say that as Americans, I don't think we're terribly good at waiting. We tend to be a Type A kind of country, aren't we? We value productivity and achievement. We see busy-ness as a sign of our importance. For most of us, waiting seems like we're doing nothing. It can even trigger feelings of guilt. Economists argue that waiting can be a drag on our economic growth. After all, December should be about all of us outside fighting the crowds for Black Friday deals. Not sitting at home, lighting a candle.

Today, more than ever, it's all about sooner, faster, and now, isn't it? My girls were watching a YouTube video for preschool the other day, and they got frustrated because they had to wait 10 seconds or so. And I have to say, as I was waiting for it to load myself, I'm thinking what's wrong with my internet connection all of a sudden? What am I paying for here?

According to a recent study by Microsoft, that's about right, because the American attention span is now down to a mere eight seconds. And if that seems crazy to you, try this on your next Zoom call. After someone finishes speaking, don't say anything. Allow a few seconds of silence to pass as if you were thoughtfully considering what they had just said. And I bet you that within eight seconds, people are going to be asking, Chris, are you still there? Did your connection freeze up?

Being constantly connected means that we're now constantly comparing ourselves to others. All of which only further magnifies our impatience to the point that many of us will go through our day with a kind of low grade anxiety about not missing out or not keeping up. And what is our solution to that? Multitasking. We all do that. In fact, it's been around for quite a while, so long that I can even remember a time when multitasking is something you did surreptitiously.

Now we're rather brazen about it. We do it while driving. We do it during meetings, over dinner, even during church. In fact, if you are at home right now, scrolling Facebook, or checking your email or responding to a text, or perhaps all three, give me an amen in the comments. I won't hold it against you. I won't take it personally. I'm preaching this sermon because I'm also working in the steps as they say. A

All of this is a long winded way of saying that of all the liturgical seasons, I've always loved the promise of Advent because it's so radically counter-cultural. I love the idea of slowing down and marinating in the small things as we wait for the biggest thing of all, the coming of Christ into our lives. It all sounds so wonderful. Of course I've never actually had time to practice it, mind you, but it does sound great, doesn't it? Like most of you, the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is the most hectic and busy in my life. It feels like a marathon of events and parties, services, programs, shopping, dinners, wrapping, cooking, and on and on.

In fact, I will confess. I've actually never made it all the way around the Advent wreath at home. I start off each season with great intentions. I get through the first week sometimes. But even that simple little practice seems to get lost in the shuffle. Of course, that's in normal years. As Father Bill quite insightfully pointed out recently, this year feels very different. It's almost as if we have been in a state of perpetual Advent, as the pandemic has forced us all into a prolonged season of waiting.

We've waited for lockdowns to end and for restaurants to reopen, we've waited for masks to become available and for paper towels to be restocked. We've waited for an opportunity to visit loved ones and to have friends over again, we've waited on test results and for the word of whether or not our kids are going back to school, we've waited on unemployment checks and stimulus payment. Any sign that our customers might be coming back. We've waited in line to vote and for election results, we've waited to come back to church in person. Free of the masks and the restrictions so that we can see old friends, meet some new ones and start to hug each other once more.

It's as if this entire year has been one of waiting. And if reports are accurate, we're not done. We're going to continue to wait for this vaccine, and for any chance of life to come back to normal. So what have we to learn from Advent this year? Are we not all experts on waiting at this point? Our gospel today suggests that as followers of Jesus, it's not just about the fact of waiting that matters, but the posture of our waiting.

Jesus cautions us today, that as we wait, we need to be alert. We need to be awake. Waiting, we are called to do and Advent is about slowing down in order to be fully present so that we might see the signs of Christ's coming again. And

so while we might be completely fed up with waiting and I don't blame you, if you are, as we begin this Advent, perhaps it's worth asking ourselves what has been the posture of our waiting? Is our waiting leading to a new way of being? Is our waiting inviting us to be more aware of God's presence in our life, or have we filled our waiting with distractions?

When forced to wait as I did the other day at the grocery store, do we dive into our phones to check our emails and get an update on the news? Or are we awake to the person in line in front of us who might be a little short on money, maybe having to decide what they have to put back? Are we alert to the cashier's need for compassion because she's new on the job and is still learning to work that scanner? Are we present enough to offer her words of encouragement, even ask her name so we might pray for her that night having seen the worry in her eyes about her own health as she encounters, and is exposed to hundreds of people each day? Has our waiting been characterized by busy-ness? Do we feel guilty about doing nothing or even the perception that we're doing nothing? Have we tried to recreate our pre pandemic pace with all new ways to keep virtually busy?

I was on a Zoom meet-up the other day with someone who was apologizing for running late because she had been on another Zoom call. And then proceeded to explain how she could only be making an appearance on this one, because she had another one to be at in a few minutes. It reminded me of a guy I had bumped into at our Christmas party we threw years ago. He was telling me how this was the third of five parties he was making an appearance that night, tagging himself at all of them on Facebook, of course. And our conversation was short, I never got his name. And as I looked back. I would have loved to tell him that it would have been perfectly okay not to come to ours. Pick one party, stay there, be present somewhere.

Has our waiting been characterized by frustration, judgment and even anger? When a car cuts us off in traffic causing us to miss a light, forcing us to wait, do we curse them under our breath? Do we shoot them a dirty look? Or are we awake enough to offer a prayer for whatever is going on in their life that is causing them to be in such a rush? When we are confronted by restrictions, we don't agree with and that force us to cancel yet another gathering that we had planned, do we react with anger and judgment or are we alert to the plight of our healthcare workers as ICU beds fill up once again? Are we present enough to even be moved to try to lend a hand somehow?

When we react to waiting in these ways, whether it's distractions or anger, busy-ness or frustration, it can feel like we're in control. It can feel like we're taking charge in some way. Those emotional reactions are strong. Self-righteousness makes us feel powerful, but as Jesus warns us, in those moments, we are actually

asleep. Rather than being on alert for God's arrival, our reactivity puts our agenda and our needs, our anxieties, our judgments, all of us at the center of whatever is going on in the moment. And when that happens, we risk missing out entirely when the master comes home.

As we enter yet another season of waiting, rather than give into feelings of anger and frustration as we wait, why not see those feelings as invitations, invitations to a different way of being? When we start feeling that nagging, feeling to multitask or distract ourselves, why not see that as an opportunity to wake up and see whatever it is that God has put in front of us? To become in the words of Isaiah, like clay, formless, able to be molded in the hands of the potter so that we might be shaped into the embodiment of Christ, into the very vessel of incarnation.

This all hit me squarely in the face just the other day. I was rushing to get somewhere, I can't remember where - we were probably running late though. And I'm trying to get the car loaded and get all the stuff in gear and get the car seats ready. And I look back and my girls have wandered off into the backyard, completely engrossed in the crunching sound that a pile of leaves can make when you're jumping up and down on them. And my first reaction was, (sigh) they're getting their shoes dirty. They're getting leaves in their hair. We're running late. They're making me wait.

And as I was having that thought, Elena picked up a big pile of leaves and threw them in the air. And she marveled as the leaves falling caught little air pockets, spinning as they drifted to the ground. And by the grace of God, her joy woke me up. I put down the car seats, I put down whatever it was I needed to be at. And I ran over there and I grabbed even a bigger pile and I threw them as high as I could, and they squealed and they screamed and we played and delighted in this simple gift of God's creation that had been right under my nose.

Like I said, I have no memory of where I was supposed to be or what we were rushing to get to. But I'll never forget the wait because it was in that moment I was reshaped. It was in that moment we were awake.

Amen.

[End of Recording]