

Sermon for 12/4/11

Isaiah 40:1-11, 2 Peter 3:8-15a, Mark 1:1-8

*Please be seated.*

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

Today is the second Sunday of the Advent season, and we continue to wait for the coming celebration of the birth of the baby Jesus. But we don't LIKE to wait! We live in a culture of instant gratification – I want it – and I want it NOW! I was surprised to see that “lay-a-way” is once more being offered by some stores. This is a whole new concept for many of the younger couples today! “Lay-a-way” was how many of us were able to set aside what we wanted for Christmas, while also accumulating the money to pay for it. Although we still had to wait until the object was ours, we knew that in the end it would be ours – and the waiting was made a little easier.

It wasn't all that long ago that “Black Friday” – the great day for shopping - was the day when stores offered their best sales – then it got to the point where the stores began to open an hour earlier – then, two hours earlier! Today, Black Friday begins at three or four o'clock in the morning – or even at Midnight! And in some places, if you simply cannot wait until then, you can go and “preview” the merchandise that will be on sale Thursday evening. Finish your Thanksgiving meal and head out the door. We simply DO NOT like to wait!

Mark chose to include the topic of waiting in the very first chapter his gospel. He quotes the prophets Isaiah and Malachi, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord,

make his paths straight.” You see, the people of the time were TIRED of waiting for the promised Messiah. They had been told all their lives that one day – nobody knew exactly WHEN – but ONE DAY, the Messiah would come. But they still had not seen the one promised. AND THEY WERE TIRED OF WAITING!

But now, here was John – proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was near – that the long-awaited Messiah was coming next. John was that messenger that Isaiah and Malachi had prophesied would come before the Messiah. John’s message was clear – the waiting is over! AND you must prepare yourselves for him. His message was “Repent – turn away from your sins – turn away from your evil ways – and be baptized! The Messiah is here! The waiting is over!” Mark writes, “And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

But for the people living at the time 2 Peter was written, that was NOT the case. For them, the waiting was NOT over! The waiting for the RETURN of our Savior Jesus was NOT over! About sixty years had now passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus. The people knew that Jesus had said that he would RETURN – AND they ALSO knew that Jesus had said that nobody would know the day nor the hour of his return. False teachers and messiahs were proclaiming the Christians had been misled – that the promises they had been told that Jesus would return again – were false – the promises were all lies. BECAUSE Jesus had NOT come back yet, HAD HE? The people were tired of waiting. Where was Jesus? What about the salvation he promised to us? The answer is one of the most quoted of Biblical texts, “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.” In other words, God’s time is not our time. And then the writer of 2 Peter explains that the reason Jesus has not

yet returned – is that he is waiting on US! That Jesus is waiting until that day when we are ALL ready to be resurrected as he is resurrected! And then, we were reassured - The day of the Lord WILL COME! Make no mistake about it – JESUS WILL RETURN. Jesus keeps his promises! Your waiting is not in vain. Your waiting will come to an end.

Today, more than two thousand years later, we are STILL waiting for Jesus to return. Accusations abound that we Christians are wrong – that we have been duped – that our waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus is foolishness. But, again, waiting is difficult! And many of us are TIRED of waiting! It may sometimes seem as if we are in a WILDERNESS of time – a wilderness that may seem bleak, tiresome – even scary. So, how do we get through this wilderness – this time of waiting? What are we to do? Where should our focus be?

The writer of 2 Peter wrote that we are to strive to be found by Jesus at peace – that we are to live in a manner in which we can wait with calm, with assurance, with peace. And how are we to do that? We are to love God and love our neighbor. We can use this time in the wilderness of waiting for renewal – for renewal as described in the words of John the Baptizer quoted by Mark. “Repent – turn away from your sins – turn away from your evil ways – and be baptized!” During this time of waiting – this season of ADVENT - we should reflect on OUR baptism and what Jesus’ coming into this world means to each one of us. What does it mean to have Jesus in our lives? What gifts has God given to each of us, and how can we use those gifts in serving others? We can use this time of waiting to wrestle with God’s Word – perhaps try something new. Try taking just a few minutes each day of this Advent season reading daily devotions – there are booklets available in the Narthex to help you. Attend a Bible study class if you have never tried it. Spend some extra time with your family.

Most of all: Keep awake! Repent! Serve God and neighbor! Jesus WILL come again!

Thanks be to God!

Amen