

Advent 1C

November 29, 2009

Hymns: 1 - 2 - 9 - 6

(Slide 1 for reading of single verse text)

I THESSALONIANS 3:13

HOLY AND BLAMELESS – “IN THE WAITING ROOM”

I. PATIENT; II. FAITHFUL; III. PREPARED

Grace and peace to you from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come. Amen!

Dear Advent Worshipers,

Over the next few weeks boys and girls will become restless with expectation and excitement--waiting on the coming of Christmas. So it is with the people of God. The Old Testament concluded with the people of Israel waiting on a coming Messiah. The New Testament concludes with the followers of Jesus awaiting His return. We have been waiting now for almost 2,000 years.

Waiting is hard to do. Much of life is spent waiting. Think of all the people waiting Friday at store checkout lines. Maybe you were one of them!? People wait every day--at the airport, at the bus depot, at the doctor's, in the amusement park ride line, at the bowling alley, at the post office, the ticket office, the unemployment office, the Social Security office. Society has become a vast waiting room.

Waiting for the return of the Messiah. Much of the New Testament is devoted to the second coming of Christ. We dare not ignore those important Biblical teachings. Nevertheless, there are some clear Biblical principles for those of us who are “in the waiting room.” As Paul prays for the Christians in Thessalonica – It is all important that we be holy and blameless in the day of our Lord. **(end slide 1)**

(Slide 2) (Big pause!) Towards that end, the first thing we must be is patient. Have you ever noticed how uncomfortable people are when nothing is going on? A great pianist tells of giving a piano recital when he was very young. He began with a Beethoven sonata that had several long rests in it. During one of those long rests, a motherly lady leaned forward, patted him on the shoulder, and said kindly: “Honey, just play us something you know.” There is an awkwardness in silence, in waiting. Waiting is no fun.

Jesus was as explicit as He could be--no one knows the hour or even the day when the Son of Man shall return. He will come as a thief in the night. No one knows. Oh, I know that it is good box office among some Christians to always be looking for the right signs. Some preachers preach on nothing else. There are two dangers in trying to rush God, however. The first is that in constantly looking toward the sky we will ignore the responsibilities we have here and now. Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.

The second danger is that we shall be taken in by false messiahs--and there are many. In 1978 the whole world was shocked and dismayed by reports from Jonestown, Guyana where the Rev. Jim Jones led hundreds of people into one of history's darkest hours--mass suicides and mass murders. These were not ignorant, primitive savages in a far off land. They were American citizens who had fallen under the leadership of a mad man.

We don't see many signs nowadays of the Moonies. Their founder Rev. Moon and his Unification Church have faded into the background. At one time he boasted considerable political support. He invested heavily in the elections of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Rev. Moon built an empire by putting young people out on the streets selling flowers. Moon preaches that a new messiah is soon to come. This new messiah is on earth already. He is a man born in Korea in the 20th century. Wonder who he could be? Surely not Moon himself! False messiahs are forever with us.

Be patient. No one knows the day or the hour of Christ's coming. It has been 2,000 years since Christ came into the world. God has His own timetable. It may be today or it may be another 2,000 years. Let no one mislead you. Be patient.

(Slide 3) The second admonition is to be faithful. Most of you have heard of the ancient epic poem by Homer called the *Odyssey*. It is the story of Odysseus who traveled the world pursuing many adventures. Meanwhile back home his beautiful wife Penelope was being pursued by various suitors trying to take advantage of Odysseus' twenty-year absence. In order to keep these suitors at bay, Penelope announced that when she finished weaving a particular garment, she would choose among these persistent suitors. There was something these suitors did not know, however. Each night Penelope undid the stitches that she put in during the daytime, and so she remained faithful to Odysseus until he returned. “Penelope” – a good name for Christian parents to call their daughter – in lieu of a good Biblical name. They can then use their daughter's name to remind her to wait patiently on sex until married to her prince charming.

Our call as Christians is to be faithful. While we wait for Christ's return, we are His body in the world, called to do His work. The church has been serving the world in Christ's name for two thousand years. Now is not the time to let up. We hear criticism of the church. Some of it is justified, some is not. We are not perfect. Some of what we do is very mundane. A pastor once said, “I sometimes fear going into heaven to stand before the Master with His nail-pierced hands. When He asks, ‘What have you suffered?’ all that I will be able to show Him is a paper cut from folding the bulletin.”

Well, folding bulletins is important. Singing in the choir is important. Working with children and youth is doubly important. We are here doing our duty as we await the coming of our Lord. Again, we can refer to the Vision Task Force's document. Consider all the areas of ministry in which you might serve your Lord, His Church and lost souls – and respond by means of the half sheet commitment forms!

Some of the criticism we hear of the church is justified, but much of it is ill informed. We need not overlook the church's problems, but neither should we hide her accomplishments. A little girl became lost. This girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where her family lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, "You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from here."

Oh, that all our people – young and old – would stay close to God through His Church/their church! Then no matter how bad they may be feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, as long as they remain among the faces of the people at their church, they will always be able to "find their way home to heaven!" Be faithful – for your own sake, for the sake of your fellow Christians, for Christ's sake! We are Christ's body in the world today. Be patient. Be faithful.

(Slide 4) But one thing more: be prepared. Be prepared for Christ's coming. Be prepared if He should come today; be prepared if He should tarry another thousand years or more. Be prepared at any cost, for we simply do not know what tomorrow may bring. Nothing is more unpredictable than the future. If there is one lesson from history, it is that.

I read recently that when the city fathers of the grand metropolis New York City planned for the future growth of their city, they laid out the streets and numbered them from the center outward. When they began, there were only six or seven streets. In their planning maps, they projected how large they thought the city might grow. Reaching beyond their wildest imagination, they drew streets on the map all the way out to 19th Street. They called it "Boundary Street" because they were sure that's as large as New York City would become. At last count, the city had reached 284th Street--far exceeding their expectations! Be careful when you try to predict the future. Today's experts turn out sometimes to be tomorrow's fools.

There is still so much we don't know about all the things that matter most, and predictions can only be based on current knowledge. Who could have predicted the wars that ravaged our planet in the twentieth century? Who could have predicted the scourge of terrorism in our own time? What wise person predicted the collapse of both the real estate market and our major financial institutions last year? With all of the latest super computers, economists cannot even predict with certainty what our dollar will be worth next year. As one man put it, if all the economists in the world were laid end to end, they still would not reach a conclusion.

We worry about global warming, but a recent report suggested that the explosion of one good sized volcano could theoretically blot out the sun and bring quite an ice age on this planet. We don't know what the future may bring. Mankind may be here another thousand years. On the other hand, today may be our last day on earth. Jesus tells us to trust God and to wait. Don't worry about what tomorrow may bring. At the same time prepare yourself--emotionally, mentally, spiritually--for whatever may come.

In the Greek there are two words for time--one is "kairos" and the other is "chronos." "Chronos"--as in "what time is it?"--is a neutral kind of word. "Kairos," on the other hand, is a word charged with power. As in the phrase "THIS is the time." It is that word that Paul uses when he talks about the time of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This may be the time. Or it may not. It is certainly the time to take stock of our lives to see if we are prepared for an unknowable future. Live each moment as if it were your last moment. The good that you would do, do now. The love that you would give, give now. The commitment you would make, make now.

You and I haven't always been patient, have we? We take things wrongly rather than letting material things come to us, according to God's plan and will. And who of us has been faithful to God as we ought day by day? How will we ever be prepared to face our Judge?! It is in the fact that Jesus is our faithful Redeemer as well as our Judge. Jesus faithfully kept His Father's law perfectly in our place. He patiently endured the cross in our place, so that we could be holy and perfect in God's eyes. Through faith, fellow Christian, you ARE prepared for Christ's return!

Let every dawn of morning be to you as the beginning of life, and every setting sun be to you as its close; then let every one of these short lives leave its sure record of some kindly thing done for others, some goodly strength or knowledge gained for yourself and God's Kingdom. This may be the hour. That is the lesson for this first Sunday of Advent. As we continue "in the waiting room" - Be patient. Be faithful. Be prepared. Amen.

May He Who began a good work in you carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.