

Sermon: What fills your wait? Reverend Heidi Champagne 11/29/2020

In this first week of Advent, the week in which we light the candle of hope, it seems strange that the lectionary gives us this apocalyptic passage from Mark to discern. On its first read, this passage seems filled with doom and foreboding. Where in this are we to wring out even a tiny bit of hope? On subsequent reads, I can't Not see the hope and the promise alongside the admonishment to remain alert. The hope that I see is in the ways that we wait as people of faith- the stuff that fills our wait.

Remember waiting in line? Back in the times before covid? I actually miss waiting in line. I miss feeling the energy of a crowd while waiting to get into a show or onto a ride. I miss striking up random conversation with strangers. I miss sitting in a movie theater, eating half a tub of buttery popcorn while awaiting the start of the previews.

And then there is also the other waiting. There is the waiting while a loved one is in surgery, the waiting for a diagnosis, the waiting for good news when a situation looks bleak. There is the waiting for that tylenol to kick in so the baby you've been walking the floor with all night can finally rest. There is the waiting for the terrible twos to give way to the life of the threenager, to the challenge of the ever independent pre-schooler. There is the waiting through teen years that can feel endless. What fills your wait?

When you find yourself with a few precious minutes of quiet while you wait in your car for a prescription to be filled, or for take out to be ready, what do you do in that time?

Last week as I drove around town delivering some of the Advent kits, I drove down Careswell street behind a garbage truck. Obviously, the truck made stops every house or two. I was first in line behind the truck, and a line of cars formed behind me. There was a solid double yellow line, a clear non passing zone, with a curve ahead. I was in a bit of a hurry, as I was trying to get all of the packages delivered and had some frozen meals to deliver that I feared would begin to defrost. But there was nothing I could do to avoid the wait unless I wanted to pass in a dangerous no passing zone. So I waited. I developed a true appreciation for this type of choreography between the driver of the garbage truck and the person who jumped off to empty the cans. Slow, stop, jump, dump, jump back on, inch toward the next driveway. The two, had they been out of rhythm, would have been much slower and less effective, but they had developed this routine that actually became mesmerizing to watch. A sense of appreciation and wonder began to fill my wait. Three cars behind me, the driver of a white pick up truck laid on the horn, as though this would inspire movement. Finally, the truck stepped on the gas loudly and cut out around the two cars behind me, my car and the garbage truck. As he did, a dump truck came around the curve and toward him from the other lane. The driver of the dump truck was alert and had either somehow anticipated the situation unfolding, or known that something unforeseen could be around the bend. They pulled slightly to the side and slowed down, creating space for the pick up. Crisis averted because the driver of the dump truck stayed alert.

What fills your wait?

We became aware of this global pandemic while in the waiting season of Lent. Incredibly, as we move into the four weeks of Advent as we await the birth of Jesus, we are still a waiting people. We are waiting for a vaccine. We are waiting to flatten the curve. We are waiting for some kind of normalcy.

What has filled our wait? Have we spent our hours lamenting all that we miss, or have we found little windows of joy in reading a good book, binge watching a tv series, taking afternoon naps, walking in the beauty of this world and taking stock in what is budded and ready to burst forth?

In our passage today from Mark's gospel, the writer of Mark has Jesus telling his disciples about waiting. He tells them to be aware and alert; to notice the signs, to trust that God will come, not in punishment but in glory to bring about the kin-dom of God for all who wait. Notice that he doesn't tell them how to avoid the wait. He doesn't provide distraction. He reminds readers and disciples what it is to simply notice.

Years ago, when Aimee was little and I worked with John in his daycare, we used to both look forward to and dread school vacations. During school breaks we had the regular attendees, plus a handful of school aged kids who needed some structure during vacation weeks. This particular February, when the time between morning snack and lunch stretched for what felt like hours and the group of school aged kids was on our last nerve, we opted to split up the groups. John worked with the younger group, while I took the kindergarteners and first graders on a field trip with no real destination in mind. I told them we were going on an adventure. We ended up at the duck pond in the center of Sandwich. As we walked down the hill and onto a public deck that juts out over the water's edge, I noted that the pond was only partially frozen. I asked the kids to line up on the deck, then lie down on their bellies, with their heads hanging off the deck. (The great thing about kids this age is that anything can be fun with the right kind of enthusiasm directed toward it.) "What do you see?" I asked them. "Ice!" answered Ayva. "Water!" answered Aimee. "Bubbles!" answered Richard. The kids grew fascinated with the large air bubbles trapped under the ice. They laid on their bellies for nearly 20 minutes, watching as wind, or a duck landing or melting or some other shift caused the bubbles to grow or change shape. "Whoa!!" they would exclaim as the bubbles moved. Leaving the pond, we walked to the natural spring and got drinks from the bubbler-another wonder, then took a walk before heading home for lunch. Wonder rather than frustration had filled our wait.

What fills your wait? What fills our wait as we move into this season of Advent? Will we have an awareness of all that pushes and pulls us? Will we dare to slow down and light our Advent wreath daily, read the mediation and take a moment to pray? Will we stop to notice and appreciate a cadence different than the one that drives us compulsively to produce and perform? Will we be bold enough or bored enough to lie on our bellies and wait for air to move beneath thin ice? I hope so! Amen.