

Advent 1 C Sermon  
Luke 21:25-28  
November 28, 2021

*What are you waiting for?*  
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*‘There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’*

*Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.’*

*‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’*

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A man stopped by the local church to talk to the minister. He told the minister, “I stole a turkey this morning on my way home from work.” The minister replied, “That was a terrible thing to do.” The man considered for a moment then said, “Yes, I know that now. Do you want it?” The

minister answered, “No, take it back and give it to the one you stole it from.” The man replied, “I tried to give it back but she refused it.” Then, the minister told him, “In that case, you can keep the turkey.” The man thanked the minister and went on his way. When the minister arrived home later that day, she discovered that her turkey had been stolen.<sup>1</sup>

It really is wonderful to see so many of you on this Post-Thanksgiving Sunday. The fact that you're here must mean that you didn't stuff yourself to the point of bursting on Thanksgiving Day or end up in the hospital after a mad dash for a flat screen TV ended in a collision with another Black Friday shopper.

I'd like to begin this morning by breaking one of the cardinal rules of preaching, that is, never start a sermon with a question. Here's my question: How many of you love to wait? C'mon, get those hands up. I know somebody here likes waiting at the drive-through or at the DMV or in the line for a public restroom? Surely somebody enjoys those last five minutes before the frozen pizza is done or the microwave dings? Children, I know must *love* waiting to open up birthday presents or Christmas presents, right? Okay, I honestly don't know anyone who likes waiting. I think that's what makes the two texts we heard moments ago so bittersweet.

In a time when the Jewish people lived in diaspora, far from home, the prophet Jeremiah promised that a righteous Branch would spring up for David—a new king of the great King David's royal family—to save the people and usher in a new age of peace and prosperity.

Still waiting for their salvation, Jesus promised the people that they would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds, redemption drawing near!

Such wonderful news, but how long would the people have to wait? They'd been waiting for centuries, but the promised one had never

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<sup>1</sup> “The Turkey,” Makeitclearnow.org, <https://www.makeitclearnow.org/relhumor.html>.

appeared. Surely it couldn't be much longer before the promised one came and brought an end to their suffering, establishing God's realm on earth.

Religious historian and author Reza Aslan, writes that:

The first century was an era of apocalyptic expectation among the Jews of Palestine . . . Countless prophets, preachers, and messiahs tramped through the Holy Land delivering messages of God's imminent judgment. Many of these so-called "false messiahs" we know by name . . . The prophet Theudas, according to the book of Acts, had four hundred disciples before Rome captured him and cut off his head. A mysterious charismatic figure known only as "The Egyptian" raised an army of followers in the desert, nearly all of whom were massacred by Roman troops. In 4 B.C.E., the year in which most scholars believe Jesus of Nazareth was born, a poor shepherd named Athronges put a diadem on his head and crowned himself "King of the Jews"; he and his followers were brutally cut down by a legion of soldiers. Another messianic aspirant, called simply "The Samaritan," was crucified by Pontius Pilate even though he raised no army and in no way challenged Rome—an indication that the authorities, sensing the apocalyptic fever in the air, had become extremely sensitive to any hint of sedition.<sup>2</sup>

And there were more, many more claiming to be the promised one or working subversively to bring God's realm to earth. "[T]he picture that emerges of first-century Palestine is of an era awash in messianic energy."<sup>3</sup> The people were waiting—had been waiting for a very long time. Surely the promised one, the messiah, could not be far off.

Today, we officially begin the season of waiting known as Advent. Not to be measured in centuries as the Jewish people's waiting had been, our

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<sup>2</sup> Reza Aslan. "ZEALOT: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth." New York: Random House, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

waiting will only last four weeks. The Jewish people of the first century knew what they were waiting for—a messiah, the promised one of God, the Branch of David, the Son of Man, who would overthrow their oppressors and usher in heaven’s realm on earth.

Likewise, we too have expectations of what it is we’re waiting for at the end of these four short weeks. I wonder, what are you waiting for? Is it the joyful birth of a babe in a manger? Hope’s star shining bright in the night sky? Peace on earth—even for a night? Love come down from heaven and into our hearts and our families? Or, do we wait simply to see the lighted tree bursting with presents, to hear Silent Night sung on Christmas Eve, to gather around hearth at home with those we hold most dear?

The Jewish people of the first century awaited Messiah, but the messiah they waited for never came. Rome still occupied their lands, took their money, and mocked their faith. The messiah the people waited for never came. What are you waiting for? Will it come, I wonder?

The truth is, Christmas isn’t about finally getting what we’re waiting for. I’ll say that again for effect: Christmas isn’t about getting what *we’re* waiting for. No, it’s about the ultimate surprise of getting *what* we need *when* we need it most.

This Advent, I invite us to be open to the possibility that what we’re waiting for this Christmas might not actually be what we get, but could be exactly what we need. I invite us to be open to the possibility that Christmas hope, peace, joy, and love might come to us in some new and never-expected way. I invite us to inhabit this waiting place, knowing that something wonderful is coming, but not entirely sure how or in whom it will come to us. Wouldn’t it be a shame to miss it just because it didn’t come how we expected?

May God bless us as we wait. Amen.