



LAKEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Hope

Luke 1:67-79

Thanks to Virginia and Ty-on for serving as liturgists this morning, and for Aidan and Jacob for representing the Troupers.

Welcome to the first Sunday of advent. As a follower of Jesus this is one of my favorite times of the year. In the United States we are very good at moving straight from Thanksgiving to Christmas. I only had to look at the lawn decorations in my neighborhood this week, there was no messing about. Inflatables Turkeys on Thursday, by Friday, boom, they are gone and suddenly Santa and Gingerbread men or whatever it is are everywhere.

We know already that the stores got into Christmas mode weeks ago, but now everyone is with them. We start cranking out the Christmas tunes and wearing the Christmas socks, squeezing every ounce out of Christmas that we can. And I am not coming at this without the tinselly guilt all over, my own hands. I love all that stuff. This is a real quote from Brennan this week when he was home for Thanksgiving. “Dad, why do you have a Liberace Christmas CD in your car? I had no good answer for that. I guess I’m just a sucker for his O Tannenbaum/We wish you a Merry Christmas medley! But moving on, my point is we move very quickly from Thanksgiving straight into Christmas.

But amidst all the Christmas business, the liturgical year gifts us with these weeks of advent.

Advent is commonly considered a season when we are gifted with a time of waiting. When we talk about waiting, we usually do not talk about it positively. I have done numerous children’s messages where I talk about the frustration of waiting for something, maybe putting some treats out and telling kids not to eat them yet, but to wait until the proper time. It’s not enjoyable! We all know the frustrations of waiting. If patience is a virtue, I

think the DMV may be the most virtuous place on earth. I don't think it's scientifically proven but that may be the place where time has slowed down the most. Perhaps only challenged by the last two minutes in that World Cup Qualifying match when the final whistle means Scotland have qualified. I experienced those slower than slow minutes last week.

It is rare for us to consider waiting positively. Waiting is hard, yet the people of God were in a time of waiting to hear the word of God, at the time of our scripture this morning. It had been 400 years since these words of the prophet Malachi were recorded, "See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple." Since then, God appears to be silent. God's people wait and they wait.

Advent invites us to join in the waiting, now of course we experience advent from another place in time, we know the story of Jesus coming, his birth his teaching, his death, his resurrection, yet we are still invited to this holy time of waiting, to celebrate his birth but to sit in the hope and anticipation of his second coming. The name advent itself, which is derived from the Latin word *Adventus*, which means coming is full of the hope of not only Jesus' birth but also this hope of Jesus' return.

So, Advent invites us to slow down, to pause, perhaps to reconnect with our faith, to prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus. I know you are thinking, yeah right, it's almost December, maybe the busiest time of the year, so many plans to be made, decorations to be put up, gifts to buy, parties to attend. All the things. And you are saying God gives us this gift of slowing down? That is exactly what I am saying.

The act of waiting on God is a spiritual act we should all practice. I am always suspicious of those who claim to be in constant contact with God, God is always speaking to them. I suspect the Christian walk in reality is much more like learning to walk faithfully while we wait on God, through times of silence as much as anything else.

Our scripture from the Gospel of Luke this morning is the prophecy or song of Zechariah. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth are wonderful examples of

what it means to walk faithfully with God, while waiting on God. Before Luke gets to Jesus or Mary and Joseph, he tells the story of Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. If you read earlier in the chapter, you will see that Zechariah was a priest of the order of Abijah and Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron, both priestly lines. We learn that they were righteous and followed God's commands. It is also worth noting that they were getting older and had no children.

The duties of the temple were shared on a rotation by the priestly families appointed by King David. When it was the turn of Zechariah's family, he was chosen by drawing lots to serve in the temple. While there the angel Gabriel, who will also appear to Mary appeared to him and told him that his prayers had been answered and his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son, whom he shall name John. The angel describes who John will be and what he will do. As Zechariah expresses surprise and questions the angel, tells him that he will be mute until these things come to pass. John comes out of the temple, and the people realize he has seen a vision and Luke tells us he goes home. This baby of course will be John the Baptist.

Zechariah's story continues after John is born and the baby is to be named on the eighth day. It is Zechariah who confirms that the baby is to be called John, his first words since he was made mute, and then he begins praising God with his prophecy or his song.

Scripture shows again and again that waiting is not the time when "nothing is happening," waiting is the time when God is shaping us. And in the waiting, we learn to walk with God.

Such is the case with Zechariah. Luke 1:67–79 presents us with the words of a man who had been waiting his entire life, an elderly priest who longed for God's promise to Israel and whose personal longing for a child had gone unanswered for decades. But in God's perfect time, both longings met: God sent John, the forerunner of Christ, and Zechariah received a son who would prepare the way for the Lord.

*After months of silence, Zechariah finally speaks. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he shares this prophetic song which we call the **Benedictus**. This song

teaches us these movements of the spiritual life: **walking with God** and **waiting on God**.

The great theme of our hymn “God of our Life”, is a call to always recognize God’s faithfulness in our life, our present, our past and our future. That allows us to walk with God though the joyful times in our life and the darker times in our life. As we look back and recognize God’s faithfulness, we can wait and have hope that God’s faithfulness will continue in the future.

As we read through Zechariah’s song, with the backdrop of walking and waiting we see a hymn of praise that bridges the Old Testament and New Testament. In it, Zechariah shows that God’s promises have not failed, that God’s mercy has not grown thin, and that God’s plan is unfolding right on time.

As Zechariah speaks, we hear that,

God remembers promises, God redeems the people, God guides us into God’s peace.

Although the people may have thought God to be silent Zechariah is clear that God’s timing is right and God is still in the business of redemption.

There is Old Testament language to be found in the song, there are references to the mission of his son John, but it is enveloped in Christology. Toward the start we read, that God has ‘raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his child David,’ if you were to read another translation you may read he has raised up a horn of salvation. That is the literal rendering of the Greek text. That is language full of Old Testament metaphor, a horn would have represented great strength. That phrase may not mean much to us now, so a mighty savior captures the meaning.

This savior comes so we might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness

in his presence all our days.

The song ends with a beautiful image of Jesus, we read in verse 78 and 79, “Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break

upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Zechariah’s song celebrates God’s faithfulness, describes the mission of John but always point to Jesus. Zechariah demonstrates and sets us an example of living with these 2 parallel movements of the Christian life. Walking with God and Waiting on God.

I encourage you to embrace those movements during this season of advent, you may not be able to completely slow down but make a conscious decision to have moments of rest and reflection. Don’t wait for it to just happen, schedule these moments. Who knows, it may be a wonderful time of rediscovery. Take advantage of these weeks, to walk faithfully with God but to also faithfully wait on God.

If you are in a season of waiting today,

For an answer, for healing, for reconciliation, for direction, for provision, for breakthrough for clarity, know this:

God is not silent. God is not absent. God is not late. God is faithful to keep promises, to redeem God’s people, and to lead God’s people into peace.

May your Hope be in God.

Like Zechariah, you may be in the quiet season, the slow season, the uncertain season—but God is shaping you, steadying you, deepening you. And when God’s promise unfolds, you will walk in God’s light with greater faith, deeper joy, and abiding peace.

This advent and for all times,

May we wait well.

May we walk faithfully.

May we live in His light.

May we know His peace.

Amen.