

## **Sermon on waiting: 'Hurry up and wait'**

Advent Communion, Sunday 2 December 2018. Silvia Purdie

Jeremiah 33:10-16

Luke 21:25-34

What is your least favourite thing to do?

I'll tell you one of my least favourite things to do, and that is waiting.

If you're in a telephone queue, and the automated voice is telling you that you are 5<sup>th</sup> in the queue, then 4<sup>th</sup> in the queue, then eventually 3<sup>rd</sup> in the queue ... will you stick around waiting on the phone until you finally get to talk to a real person? Or will you have given up in disgust long before?

There's something about waiting that feels so helpless. There's a powerlessness about sitting there holding the phone that makes the frustration rise, until you can hardly remember what you even rang the stupid number in the first place!

Have you ever waited in a really long queue? I remember going to a theme park with the boys on the Gold Coast, and being stuck in a really really long line, to get into the Scooby Doo ride ... for over an hour we stood there, every now and then shuffling one place forward, from the footpath outside, into the foyer, through a big hall with the line snaking back and forth, the eventually up to the desk where they took your ticket and then, just when you were really excited because you had made it, then there was another queue through the corridor down to the actual ride. Blimey. All to get shaken and thumped and tipped up and dropped down and shaken and shuddered for 5 minutes. True story.

What goes on in your head when you have to just wait?

Some people can just serenely tune out, enjoy the absence of tasks to do, smile at those around them, humming quietly to themselves. Me, I get stressed out with the waiting, constantly checking the line to see if it's moving.

I am not a patient person by nature. I've had to learn. Things in life don't always happen just when we want them to happen. In fact, hardly ever do things happen just when we want them to.

That's just life. Waiting is part of life.

Welcome to Advent. In our church calendar Advent is the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas. In our church theology it is a time of waiting. We wait for the Christ child. The themes of Advent stir up longing and hope, a keen awareness that life is not how it should be or how it will be, that we are caught in the in-between times this side of eternity. The prayer of Advent is, 'Come, Lord Jesus, Come'.

The trouble is, the four weeks before Christmas don't feel like that at all. Christmas each year seems to jump out and grab us before we're quite ready for it. Oh no not Christmas again, already! There's hardly time for waiting, it's more - 'coming ready or not!'.

We bought all our church and music group families an Advent gift this year. It is an Advent calendar, but not a 'open the doors and eat the chocolates' kind of Advent calendar. This is a construction thing. Each day of Advent, from today through to Christmas, the children will have a new piece to add to the scene, a character, an angel, a donkey, a star ... and there is a story for each day, another piece to the puzzle of the birth of Jesus.

I wonder how many of the families will do it as instructed, wait a whole day before adding the next piece. Would you? Or would you put the whole thing together all at once? Bother this waiting thing, let's just get it done, see the whole finished construction! I wonder.

I expect I'd be in the latter category. Just as well I haven't been given one. I'm too hasty. I want results now. I don't like waiting.

Over the last month we have been through a series on the last days, the big tough hard-to-get-your-head-around questions about the meaning of life and ultimate destiny of the universe. Our readings and questions lead us to Jesus' words we heard this morning. Jesus taught his disciples about a coming day ... the very end of our reading says "that day will suddenly catch you". "That day". Which day? In my Bible the word 'Day' is written with a capital letter. That Day. As Jesus said, the Kingdom of God is about to come. When? You don't know when, but keep an eye out for

any day could be That Day. Jesus did prophecy some sign posts, which could point to the coming of the Kingdom of God, when Jesus himself, the Son of Man, will return in glory ... troubles, wars, conflicts, people afraid of the raging tides and the falling of stars.

You probably know folks who see world events through the lens of these verses. Any day, any time now, could be That Day.

I honestly don't know quite what to make of these teachings of Jesus. I do not dismiss them, but they are not the main way I see the world. I figure that if the Lord is coming back it's not up to us to try to figure out when or how or where ...

What interests me is what Jesus asked of his disciples. In the light of the ultimate future of turmoil and God's remaking of the universe, what is required of us here and now? That's the question that interests me.

And Jesus is pretty clear in his teaching about this. Jesus called his followers to live ready. Alert. Don't get too embroiled with this world, with the troubles or the parties. Don't live in fear and don't sobble up your problems with food and wine.

To me Jesus words are pretty clear. Live in this world and invest yourself in doing your best to care for other people and to care for the world, but keep your head up, keep your ear out, keep your eyes open, for there is more to come. There is a Kingdom not of this world which is coming into the world. Jesus said that we who follow him are not "of" this world.

**John 15:19** *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but you are not of the world. I chose you out of the world, and because of this the world hates you.*

So it's a 'both-and' thing. Yes we get on with life, we do eat and drink, especially at Christmas time. We do tackle the problems of this world, but we are not fully immersed in this life, these problems, this world. We are waiting for the Kingdom of God to sweep everything up and us with it, and while we wait, we get on with it.

My husband's family have a saying. When things are not entirely in your control they say, "hurry up and wait".

Sounds like Advent to me. Life rushes on and yet in a Jesus place in our hearts we are waiting. So we say 'Come Lord Jesus'. Even in the busyness we can rest a while. Even in the stresses and anxieties and so much that is not working out as we think it should, we can trust.

Our Advent candle for today is hope. This is something to lean on as everything else comes and goes. Hope gives us the courage and resilience to wait. Hope is the glimpse of what is coming; like Jeremiah had the vision that despite the desolation he could see around him, he was holding firm to a promise, a promise from God.

<sup>4</sup> *The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>15</sup> In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."*

We gather this morning around this table, the table of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the table of promise, for Jesus himself promised to be with us through everything. I am with you, he said, till he end. This is the table of hope, for Jesus himself is our hope ... hope not founded in our effort or success or goodness, but in what Jesus has done for us. This is hope forged in the breaking, found in the out-pouring.

This is the table of the Kingdom of God breaking into the world, a tiny taste of what is to come. As we eat this bread and drink this cup we receive strength to live with our heads up, ready and alert for his return.