



*Waiting and Healing*

November 8, 2020: The First Sunday of Advent

The Rev. Nicholas M. Morris-Kliment

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

*Oh Lord: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight oh Lord, our Rock and our redeemer.*

When I first saw these readings a week ago, I thought to myself, there is nothing hopeful here for a preacher who will be speaking after the most corrosive campaign season, and perhaps the most viciously polarizing election, in at least 50 years, in the midst of a pandemic and the continuing revelation of persistent social and racial inequality. Nothing hopeful here.

I have come to think I was wrong. Thank God for the Holy Spirit. I'm not very creative on my own.

The readings are about waiting, what we do while we wait, what are we waiting for, and especially, who are we waiting for.

We've been waiting a long time, haven't we? Waiting for the pandemic to end. Waiting for competent leadership, effective treatment. Waiting for a vaccine. Waiting to really go back to school, back to work, back to church, waiting to shake hands, go to concerts and games, to hug friends who are outside our bubble, waiting to stop wearing masks, to stop being afraid. Waiting for the election, waiting for the mudslinging and lying to stop, waiting for decency to return, waiting for a new beginning, waiting for hope.

The presidential election, for all intents and purposes, seems to be decided—but even here, we are waiting for the dust to settle.

Our readings are, among other things, about waiting. Joshua is giving a speech to the Israelites just before he dies. The book with his name describes an idealized takeover of the land of Canaan, at the end of their long wilderness period that began when Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. As the Israelites prepare for his death, they have been waiting for a word of guidance, inspiration, and hope for their future

Paul is speaking to his church in Thessalonica. They believe the return of Jesus is imminent. How long would it be? How should they wait? Among their many questions is about waiting is: what will happen to those believers who have already died? Will Jesus meet them, too?

And then there is the Gospel. Jesus' apparently harsh parable that describes the Kingdom of God as like waiting to get into a wedding that you are shut out of, if you are not there when the groom arrives.

The season in the Church Year that we begin today is built on waiting and yearning. The original season of Advent in the early Church was seven weeks, and so we return to that ancient tradition. The primary emphasis of Advent was not only to prepare for the birth of Jesus. The emphasis was on the ends, the purposes of God. The emphasis is also on *our* responsibilities as agents of God's reign on earth, to help renew creation, and usher in the reign of God. (<http://www.theadventproject.org>)



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Waiting.

While the Israelites wait, Joshua throws them a challenge: put away the foreign gods among you and choose who you will serve. As we begin this Advent time of waiting, on top of the waiting we are already doing, how will we wait? What will we do? Who will we serve? What foreign Gods need to be put away?

Jesus's parable makes us scratch our heads as to how to wait, and what the Kingdom of God looks like. Is it bad to share? Is it sometimes a fatal mistake to be unprepared? Are there times with God when there are no second chances?

Remember that parables do not usually have a single lesson that presents itself. We have to guard against turning a parable into an allegory, where each part of the story stands for something or someone.

While one of my favorite definitions of a parable is a stick of dynamite wrapped in a story, here's another definition. A parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, that arrests the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaves the mind in sufficient doubt to its precise application to tease the mind into active thought. (C.H. Dodd)

For sure, this parable fits that description: everyday life, vivid, strange, doubt as to how we apply it to our lives.

On Tuesday mornings at 8am, men in the parish gather on Zoom for prayer and conversation. We usually look at the Gospel for the following Sunday and see how we can apply it to our lives. As we applied our minds and teased them into active thought, I left that meeting with a couple of helpful reflections on our parable:

No matter what the outcome of the election, there is still much work to do to heal our nation. Just because the bridesmaids miss the boat this time, there will be other occasions to be ready to choose hope, to work for justice, healing, and reconciliation. There is no room for complacency.

I was inspired in this regard by a webinar I went to Wednesday night after the election. Sponsored by Braver Angels, it featured pairs of "Blue" people and "Red" people sharing the fruits of their relationships in light of the election. A Red/Blue pair is a Republican and a Democrat who have agreed to do the work of depolarization.

What I heard brought a lump to my throat. From Paul (Red) and Leslie (Blue): They described themselves as civic friends—that is, friendly but not friends, connected by their devotion to working out how to live productively and constructively together. They had shared meals in one another's homes as part of their work. Leslie described a Trump supporter whose neighbor, a Biden supporter, had had their Biden lawn sign stolen. The Trump supporting neighbor replaced the Biden sign. Paul declared about Leslie, "I'm a Trumper, but I love her."



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Or Steve and Lynn. Steve, a “Red”, always wears a blue sweater when attending Braver Angels events. He says of Lynn, “I would trust her with my life.” Lynn says, “The hard work of listening to understand, rather than to change minds, really does work.” Or Carlos and Thomas, who are national co-chairs of the Braver Angels of Color Advisory council. They’ve created a safe space where people of color all along the political spectrum can be honest about what they think and not be accused of being Uncle Toms or worse. They’ve come to the conclusion that politics is not the core of their identity, so they are free to respect and enjoy one another.

This gives me hope for our future. The Holy Spirit is at hand in this kind of civic work. Here’s the kind of *active* waiting and is a necessary part we play to bring into being the reign of God.

**Amen.**