

Lectionary A November 27, 2016 First Sunday in Advent  
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church Evansville, Indiana  
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Isaiah 2:1-5  
Psalm 122  
Romans 13:11-14  
Matthew 24:36-44

### **The Gift of Waiting**

Ten-year-old Hope is my adopted granddaughter. Here's how it happened. One day Hope's Mom, Linda, Hope, my granddaughter Kennedy, and I were eating lunch at a Mexican restaurant. I don't know how the conversation got there, but Hope made the comment that she didn't have a grandma. Hers were both gone to heaven. Well, Kennedy chimed in, "You can share my grandma." Then she looked at me. "Raise your right hand, Grandma." When I did she instructed me, "Repeat after me: I, Roberta, promise to be Hope's grandma." Thus, Hope is my granddaughter.

Well, Hope had a birthday last week. Her mother and I went together to get her one of those realistic looking silicone baby dolls. That is what she wanted. We ordered it online, but the thing was, it didn't have a specific day it would be delivered. It did not come on her birthday.

So, we made sure she would have something to unwrap on her birthday. We got her a diaper bag and filled it with things for her baby doll. It was like she had a baby shower for her baby that was coming soon. We told her she was getting a doll, but we didn't know when, and—we wouldn't show her a picture of the doll. We told her that when moms have babies, they don't know when they are coming or what their babies look like.

It was hard for Hope to wait. She was anxiously awaiting the arrival of her baby. I told her I would call when it arrived at my house. She begged her mom to show her a picture of the doll. Linda didn't cave in. Hope had to wait for a couple days. She told me she fell asleep at night imagining what her new baby would look like. Together, we made a game of waiting for Hope's new baby. When I called her to tell her the box had arrived. She was thrilled. I think she will always remember waiting expectantly for that gift. Waiting with her mother and I was part of the gift and made it very special.

Waiting is hard. And it was hard for those to whom Matthew was writing.

When our Gospel in Matthew was written, it had been fifty years or so after the events he describes took place. And like most early Christian communities, Matthew's congregation had been expecting Jesus to return to them for quite some time. In fact, some scholars think that the Gospels were written partially to encourage Christians who were confused and discouraged by Jesus' delayed return. For this reason, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all three devote a section of their Gospel to encouraging their readers to stay awake, keep prepared, and wait expectantly for Jesus' return. *"About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*

Yes, and 2000 years later we are still waiting. Good things and bad things are happening all around us. Are these signs that time is short? Or is this simply life? What if we replaced Matthew's examples with some from our current time? Two people working side by side in an assembly line; one was diagnosed with cancer, another not. Two individuals apply for the same job, one gets it the other doesn't. Two little girls are born, one grows up and follows a path of addiction and crime, the other does not. Two couples were joined in marriage; one stayed married, the other did not. When we are on one side or the other of these situations we tend to ask, why me? Is this a sign? *About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*"

*Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.* What if these examples aren't given to separate us? On one side are the ones in and on the other are the ones out? What if instead, they are to join us, to encourage us to be there for each other while we are all waiting? Matthew's stories are all about walking together two by two. No one is in this life alone. Sometimes one is up and the other is down. Pretty much all of us get our turn at being in both kinds of situations, the happy ones and the tragic ones.

This became obvious to me last month as I walked with three of our families as their loved ones left this earth. Amid funeral preparation, babies were born to my friends on Facebook. Others celebrated birthdays and weddings and new jobs and ordination anniversaries. Yet, others were diagnosed with life threatening diseases, a family was killed on the highway, and a young man, who I taught in Bible School, was the one who, under the influence of alcohol, crashed into them. My heart and prayers are pulled both ways.

See, I believe the point is, we are all walking side by side. Ours isn't to worry about signs and clues about Jesus' second coming, because no one knows, not even Jesus. Let's not get distracted by things that happen. Instead, be alert, look for God in the middle of all of life. Look for opportunities to be there for each other. Reach out to take the hand of the ones beside us who are hurting. Find ways to help, to encourage, to support each other. Because, trust me, we all get our turn at being on the other side. Waiting is part of the gift. It gives us chances to experience relationships that enrich us with hope and joy in this time between Christmas and Jesus' coming again.

Yesterday, I participated in another funeral. No, they said it wasn't a funeral. It was a going home celebration for a dear woman who used to come to the Mission of Grace for our bible study. Betty was a wise woman in her eighties who had gotten married at the age of fourteen, raised seven children and saw all kinds of things happen in her life, some good and some tragic. Through it all she was awake, alert, expectant for all God had coming her way. That expectant hope in the life of this joyful sweet woman helped all who were fortunate to know her. She was a walking example of what Matthew is talking about here. Just live and love and look for God's grace and one of these days when you least expect it, your gift will arrive. Waiting is part of the gift.

Let me tell you that celebration yesterday was like heaven on earth. I was there in the midst of family and friends at Mr. Pleasant Baptist Church on Riverside, Odeie Stewart was at the piano singing and glorifying God in a way only she can do. The choir was singing, people were

clapping, with—yes, with tears and laughter and hope for Jesus' promises—the promises Jesus carried to the cross for every last one of us.

On this first Sunday of Advent, we lit the candle of hope. If you think about it waiting and hope go together. Without waiting, there would be no reason to hope. So, enjoy this expectant time. Be alert, looking for ways to be there for each other as we wait. Let's live with hope, just like my new young granddaughter, whose name is Hope. As we wait, let's go to sleep dreaming about what gifts are coming our way. Because, as the Message Bible says it, "*Be vigilant just like that. You have no idea when the Son of Man is going to show up.*"

Amen