



ADVENT: WAITING WELL
WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART
MATTHEW 24:36-51
12-06-20

All = bold sections – read together

Leader = regular font – leader reads (choose or rotate leaders)

Sung together = italics

NOTE: Please have a white candle ready to light.

Reflect

Celebrating Advent means being able to wait. Waiting is an art that our impatient age has forgotten. It wants to break open the ripe fruit when it has hardly finished planting the shoot. But all too often the greedy eyes are only deceived; the fruit that seemed so precious is still green on the inside, and disrespectful hands ungratefully toss aside what has so disappointed them. Whoever does not know the austere blessedness of waiting—that is, of hopefully doing without—will never experience the full blessing of fulfillment. Dietrich Bonhoeffer- God is in the Manger

Welcome

Good Morning! We enter the second week of Advent as we focus on waiting well for the return of our King, Jesus of Nazareth. May we strive to make the most of our opportunity, whether at home or at the sanctuary to worship our Triune God, grow in our understanding and faith in Jesus Christ and be nourished through the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and among us.

May the love and joy of the Father, the grace and peace of the Son and the courage and comfort of the Holy Spirit be ours in abundance this morning.

Call to Worship – Psalm 32 - A MASKIL OF DAVID (MASKIL IS PROBABLY A LITERARY OR MUSICAL TERM IN REGARDS TO HOW THAT PSALM WAS TO BE SUNG OR RECITED)

The Psalms speak to both our head and heart and as such are powerful ways to connect with God and to know ourselves better. They are often very helpful to put to words what we might be feeling or thinking.

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.



Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

How is this Psalm “speaking” to/about your head (thinking/thoughts) and/or heart (feelings) this morning?

Song – Great are You Lord -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKzXZPFBwLQ>

*You give life, You are love
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore
Every heart that is broken
Great are You, Lord*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only*

*You give life, You are love
You bring light to the darkness
You give hope, You restore
Every heart that is broken
Great are You, Lord*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise to You only*

*And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord*

*And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord*

*And all the earth will shout Your praise
Our hearts will cry, these bones will sing
Great are You, Lord*



*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
To You only*

*It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
We pour out our praise
It's Your breath in our lungs
So we pour out our praise
To You only*

Advent Candle – Peace (Uzbekistan)

Picture a man named Abraham. He was 75 years old and married to Sarah, who was also well along in years. They had been married for a lifetime, yet they had no children. God came to Abraham in his old age and said,

“Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Let’s be clear: God was asking a lot of Abraham. “Leave everything you know and go to a place I will show you. Put your trust in me and I will bring you to a place that will someday be known as Canaan. I will make you a great nation! You don’t have any children yet, but just trust me, you will.”

Yes, God asked a lot of Abraham. But God promised Abraham even more. He promised descendants, blessings, and protection on the journey. God asked a lot, promised a lot, and Abraham had faith. As he embarked on this journey, he put his trust in God. And God gave him peace.

The peace that filled Abraham as he embarked on a very unknown, dangerous, and difficult journey is the same peace that God offers to us today in the midst of our unknown, dangerous, and difficult journey. God asks a lot, but he promises so much more. What peace!

Jesus of Nazareth said that to be a Christian means to be maltreated for his name’s sake (Matthew 5:11) and the apostle Paul said that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Mistreatment as a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of *if* but a matter of *when* and a matter of *degree*. Hope is a vital aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. This is especially true under heavy persecution. In America, the land of religious freedom, we have it pretty easy in that there is minimal outright persecution against Christians. **May we make the most of our religious freedom to honor Christ and give credible and coherent witness to him! At the same time, may we be aware of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who don’t share the same freedom that we do. The 18th place that is most challenging to be a disciple of Jesus is Uzbekistan.**

Of the 33 million people in Uzbekistan, 350 thousand are Christian. Under the authoritarian rule of the president, the government heavily restricts religious expression, outlawing all unsanctioned religious



expression. This means any non-orthodox Christian group is illegal – and even Orthodox groups can preach only in Russian since doing so in Uzbek is against the law. Additionally, since the culture is largely Muslim, Christians who convert from Islam face pressure and potentially violence from their families and communities. Christian women who came from Islam face increased pressure through forced marriage and sexual violence.

Prayer Points: Pray that Christian converts from Islam would be delivered from threats of violence from their family and communities. Pray with Christian groups who are targeted by the government because they are not sanctioned by the state. Pray for safety and for courage. Pray for the isolated believers who have converted from Islam and are unable to publicly express their faith for fear of discovery. Pray they will find fellowship and peace.

Jesus is the Light. We are a light. Shine His light!

Song – I Will Wait For You -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8C3WQ1G1Uso>

*Out of the depths I cry to You
In darkest places I will call
Incline Your ear to me anew
And hear my cry for mercy, Lord
Were You to count my sinful ways
How could I come before Your throne?
Yet full forgiveness meets my gaze
I stand redeemed by grace alone
I will wait for You, I will wait for You
On Your word I will rely
I will wait for You, surely wait for You
Till my soul is satisfied
So put Your hope in God alone
Take courage in His power to save
Completely and forever won
By Christ emerging from the grave
I will wait for You, I will wait for You
On Your word I will rely
I will wait for You, surely wait for You
Till my soul is satisfied
Now He has come to make a way
And God Himself has paid the price
That all who trust in Him today
Find healing in His sacrifice
That all who trust in Him today
Find healing in His sacrifice
I will wait for You, I will wait for You
Through the storm and through the night*



*I will wait for You, surely wait for You
For Your love is my delight*

*I will wait for You, I will wait for You
Through the storm and through the night
I will wait for You, surely wait for You
For Your love is my delight*

Song – Come Thou Long Expected Jesus -- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s59F9u8ZIBM&feature=emb_title

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.
Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

Centering Prayer

Spend some time in prayer for our church, our city, our country, your family and friends.

Offering – Ripon Christian School

We remember that giving is an act of faith, a practice of hope and an expression of love.

(You can give by sending your offering to the church, P.O. Box 217, Oakdale Ca 95361 or consider giving online through your bank. Our deacons can help you with this if necessary.)

Youth Celebration – Wiggles and Giggles

Remember the five main reasons youth are an important presence within our congregation? They were: (1) they are image bearers of God, (2) passion, (3) agents of ministry now, (4) value relationships and (5) culture connectors. Now, most of us were probably thinking of our youth above age 5 or so. But what about our little ones? What about or infants? Yes, they too are vital members of our community. Their wiggles and giggles and sometimes cries are wonderful, beautiful and welcomed sounds within our congregation. They speak toward youthfulness, new life and vitality. May we never give the young parent(s) an eye of disdain, judgement, anger, or hostility of any kind because they might be distracting us. Yes, there are times when the infant or young child needs to be taken out, but when that rare time comes, may we respond in love and with compassion and empathy. When we think of the next 100 new people to grace the doors of our church, may we be thinking and praying for many infants so that



we might have more wiggles and giggles to celebrate!

Scripture Reading – Matthew 24:36-51

We continue our series, Jesus of Nazareth by engaging with Matthew 24:36-51 for the second week of Advent. As you recall, Advent is about waiting. The believers waiting for a Savior many centuries ago ended with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth (the incarnation). Believers waiting for Jesus of Nazareth to return again today, is ongoing. It has not happened. We wait. But how well do we wait? Scripture is not silent about how we are to wait for Jesus. This morning's passage will speak toward our not knowing the time of his bodily second coming. This can be hard. We like to know so that we might plan accordingly. Jesus addresses that as well – how we are to plan our waiting. And, it really is quite simple – be ready at all times. But how do we do that well over the long haul? How do we remain ready, expectant and prepared for his coming? The following two weeks will get into more specifics (especially the last week). Today, we will focus more on the general posture of staying awake and the general action of being ready.

Gospel Message – Waiting Is The Hardest Part

I love waiting...said no one ever! Why? Because no one likes to wait. Why does no one like to wait? Well, when we are waiting for someone or something, it means that presently there is an absence; that the current experience is incomplete, unfinished, lacking. Therefore, waiting means absence. It means that the present experience involves pain, sorrow, discomfort, fear, anxiety, loneliness, heartache, illness, suffering, poverty, and/or hunger that the future might replace with pleasure, joy, comfort, courage, eager anticipation, belonging and community, happiness, health, flourishing and/or satisfaction. The future has what the present lacks. Thus, we long for and wait for that future. We can't wait for our child to return from college because their absence created a longing for their presence. When the child returns, there is great joy! Recently, a family member was eagerly waiting for an important piece of mail to arrive that would either confirm or deny their hopes of what would be lying ahead for them. They were "religiously" checking the mail everyday hoping the letter arrived. There was disappointment when it didn't but also a heightening hope as each day passed. When the letter arrived, there was great joy. Why? Because the waiting was over! The future had arrived. Absence had become presence. Hope had become fulfillment.

Jesus of Nazareth is preparing his disciples for the ultimate future event, the event of all events, the event to which none is greater – his second bodily coming. This event will forever put everything right. It will be a time of unfathomed joy and delight and fulfillment and excitement and vindication for those found in Christ as his disciples. When will this happen? Well, that's the rub - we don't know. It could be any moment. It could be thousands of years in the future (although we are now 2,000 years closer than the disciples were!) We don't know. And that's the challenge and difficulty. We want to know. Maybe for good reasons (eager anticipation and preparation). Maybe for bad (mess around doing my own thing right up until the arrival and then fake a desire for it). Either way, we wait. The question becomes, "how do we wait?" What does Jesus instruct us to be doing and to be like? Is it a passive waiting? An active waiting? If the latter, then active in what? And how? And why? This morning we will tackle the more general answer to these questions. Next week we will get a bit more specific with Jesus' expectations of us and then for the final week of Advent, we will get very specific as to what Jesus has in mind. But for today, we will focus on our difficulty with waiting because truly, waiting can



be one of the hardest parts of being a disciple of Jesus. But it doesn't have to be. Waiting can be beneficial, redemptive and vital to our discipleship. But before we get to the specifics of that, let's see what Jesus was teaching his disciples about waiting for his bodily second coming.

Jesus has just informed the disciples, with images and metaphors that they would have been familiar with, that the complete destruction of their beloved temple would happen during the time of that generation (although only the apostle John was still alive when it occurred). And it did in AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem by the Roman army led by Titus. The purpose of this was Jesus vindicating his ascension to the right hand of God, a position of glory and power and to show that he was truly THE Messiah that the Jews were waiting for – that they ended up denying, betraying and killing their one and only hope. The destruction of the temple was Jesus coming in judgement over the unbelief of the Jewish leaders and people. In doing this, Jesus was unmooring them, disentangling them from idolatrous attachments to a city and structure (Jerusalem and the temple) and re-orientating them to himself – that he is the new and eternal temple that the previous ones were pointing to. They were only signs and shadows; Jesus is the real thing. Now, he is preparing them to wait well for his second bodily coming when he would judge the living and the dead and forever put everything right.

Matthew 24:37 says, "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man." What were the days of Noah like? Jesus answers that in the following verse from Matthew 24:38-3: "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man." A huge mistake that many "end time" folks get wrong is to focus on what that generation was like by going to Genesis and reading about their evilness. Jesus does not focus our attention on that. His focus is captured by the descriptive word he uses of that generation, "unaware." What was the generation of Noah like? They were unaware. What evidence does Jesus give? He says they were eating and drinking; that is, going about everyday life like there was no crisis about to happen and marrying and being given to marriage; that is, going about ordinary life as if nothing catastrophic was about to happen. Jesus is saying that life was going on as normal. There was no awareness of the impending judgement and doom that was about to come upon them. Far from emphasizing the increase of evil, wars and violence (he did that already for the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple which has already been fulfilled and made it clear that most of those signs are not specific for anything – they are just the beginning of the birth pains), Jesus emphasizes their unawareness. That is the focus. That is the message Jesus is communicating to his disciples then, and now.

To emphasize this unawareness, Jesus gives a startling (and again, mostly misinterpreted by many end time folks) illustration involves two pairs of people. One pair is two men working in a field together. The other pair is two women grinding at a mill together. The emphasis is on their unawareness. They are going about their regular, everyday life as if nothing is about to happen. Then suddenly, without any sign or warning, one is taken and one is left behind. Jesus' very clear point is about unawareness. It is not about a rapture of Christians off this earth like so many end time people want to make it. That is a case of completely missing the point of Jesus. How far off point? Well, who was taken and who was left behind? Jesus doesn't say here because that is not his point. But, if we were to venture an



educated, biblically informed deduction, the person taken is not the Christian but the unbeliever. Yes, I know. This is not what the vast majority of Christianity believes and it goes to show how much influence Hollywood and media has had on the church today. Hal Lindsey and his book *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the *Left Behind* series by LaHaye and Jenkins and subsequent movies have shaped a couple of generations now away from biblical truth, creating misunderstanding and unhelpful postures of ambivalence and antipathy towards God's world that he is saving from sin and its effects. Why do I believe that it is the unbelievers taken? Two things. First, look at our text again. Who was left behind in the days of Noah and who was "taken"? The righteous were left behind and the wicked were taken. It was Noah and his family who were left behind. It was the evil, unbelieving rest of humanity that were taken and destroyed and removed. Second, there are a plethora (and I mean dozens) of explicit passages in scripture that speak about the removal of evil and that the good is left behind. I have over 20 such passages in my notes but only need to show a few to make the point. Psalm 119:119 speaks of the wicked being discarded like dross. What is dross? It is the contaminants that are removed from gold or silver to make it pure. The dross, that is contaminants is removed and the gold/silver is left behind. In Matthew 13 we have already seen Jesus underscore this principle of the bad being removed and the good being left behind (and he has done this numerous times in the book of Matthew). He utilizes the images of weeds and bad fish that will be tossed out to where... to where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The good fish and the wheat are left behind. Deuteronomy, in various passages speaks to "purging the evil from your midst." Again, evil is removed and the good is left behind. Finally, in our passage today we already read about this principle. Where does the wicked servant go? He is taken to the place where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." The good servant is left behind in the household of the master. In every instance, it is the evil that is removed and the good left behind. That is the biblical principle and standard. All this to say – You want to be left behind!

Jesus then makes his point explicitly clear in verse 42: "Stay awake!" That is an imperative, a command and not a suggestion. Instead of being unaware, we are to stay awake. Why? Because Jesus will come like a thief in the night (vv. 43-44). He says that the owner of a house would stay awake and be ready if they knew when the thief was going to arrive. In the same way, we know that Jesus will come like a thief in the night so we are to stay spiritually awake and be ready for him. In this short parable, Jesus is likening being unaware to being asleep. Unaware equals asleep and aware equals awake. Again, aware of what? We are to be aware that Jesus is going to be coming again bodily and at a time that we will not expect it. It will be sudden, like a thief in the night and we will not have time to prepare. The time to prepare is now and the way to prepare is to be ready and as we will see more explicitly in the following two weeks, to be ready is to be active in using our God-given talents in service to our King. How often do we fall asleep on the job so to speak? How often are we sleep-walking through life, not paying attention to the larger divine drama that we find ourselves in and not prepared or ready for Jesus to come again? How often do we get distracted or caught in lesser things that draws our focus, out attention, our awareness away from Jesus of Nazareth and his coming again?

How many of us have seen someone sleepwalking before? How many of us have sleep walked and remember it to some degree? Share a story or two about the experience of seeing someone sleepwalking or actually sleepwalking yourself.



Sleepwalkers appear to be awake, but they are not. They are mostly asleep. Experts believe that sleepwalking happens when a person is in a stage of deep sleep and gets partially awoken in a way that triggers physical activity while remaining mostly asleep. Mostly asleep. While they can walk and talk and open doors and more, they are mostly disengaged and unaware of what is happening and are not in control of what is happening. They are not aware nor ready to engage meaningfully with others or in accomplishing their responsibilities. Sleepwalkers are generally just that, asleep with the appearance of being awake. Because we can appear to be awake by showing up at church, saying some of the right things, we need to take a close look at ourselves and if need be, slap ourselves in the face to wake up to reality; to wake up to the divine drama we find ourselves in; to wake up in eager and expectant and hopeful readiness for Jesus to return at any moment. Jesus calls all his disciples today to not be sleepwalkers. He calls us to be awake. That obviously does not mean that we are not ever to physically sleep as the parable for next week will make clear and what is obviously not possible. It does mean that our lives are to be characterized by a state of “awareness”; a state of being alert to the fact that Jesus is coming back again one final time to judge and separate evil from good forever. But what does that state of being awake look like? It means being active in our responsibilities as disciples of Jesus. In other words, staying true in our actions to our identity as disciples of Jesus. That is, we are to stay in character as Jesus’ witnesses until our dying breath or he returns, whatever happens first. This is what the last parable of our text is about.

Jesus’ parable that contrasts a “faithful and wise” servant from a “wicked” servant helps us understand this better. A master has a servant who is responsible for preparing food for his household – the master and spouse, children and other servants. In the parable, the master leaves and is gone from the household for an undermined but apparently long time. The master’s expectation is that the servant will continue to provide the meals for his family and servants at the normal and regular times while they are gone. However, the wicked, that is the unfaithful and foolish servant thinks that because the master of the household is going to remain gone for a long time, they can do what they want and abandon their responsibilities. They think they are going to get away with it. So, the wicked servant disobeys the master and does not provide the meals like they are supposed to. Instead, they mistreat the other servants, and goes out partying. The wicked servant neglects their responsibilities to the master. In other words, the servant falls asleep to what they were supposed to be doing. The servant begins to sleepwalk. They are not aware (or believe) that the master might return any moment and therefore lives as if the master will not return for a long time. The servant acts as if they no longer need to be faithful to their duties because the master is no longer physically present. Jesus calls this foolish and being unfaithful. Why? Well for one, the master does arrive at a time the servant did not expect it and is caught red-handed not fulfilling their responsibilities as a servant to the master. For another, it reveals the servant’s heart for their master and household and fellow servants – they don’t really care or love them. The servant only cares and loves themselves; to do what they want to do. It reveals that the work of the servant was pure duty with no joy or delight in serving the master nor the others. It reveals that in the end they want to be like the lost younger brother to go about freely doing whatever they want, despite it being contrary to the will of the master. The question that asks, “What are you like when no one is looking” is apropos (appropriate) here. When there is no one looking over your shoulder or nearby to check on what you are doing, what do you do? Do you continue to faithfully carry out your responsibilities with joy and delight or do you abandon them to do your own thing? In



all honesty, we all do both to varying degrees. None of us are perfect. We all fall back onto the pendulum of lostness through disobedience and giving in to the temptations of the pleasures of this world. That is why we need grace. That is why we need mercy. That is why we need forgiveness. That is why we need the all surpassing love of God for us in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. That is why we respond in gratitude and delight. That is why we respond with diligent delight to seek first the kingdom of God. That is why we train and engage with practices that continue to shape and conform us not to the likeness of the world but to the image and likeness of Jesus of Nazareth in whom we have life and life eternal.

Jesus of Nazareth is the master that is physically away from us right now. He is the thief that will come at a time when we are not expecting it, a time when we are going about our daily activities. Jesus is the one that will suddenly take the wicked in judgment, purging them from his good creation and leave his faithful disciples behind to enjoy creation apart from sin, evil, wickedness. Are you ready for that? Are you ready to face your King and your Judge? Do you wake up daily in eager expectation that this might be the day and seek to be awake and ready for him by being active in your calling as disciples of Jesus today? If Jesus came yesterday at 7 PM, what would he have found you doing? If he looked at your last week, month, year would he say, "Well done good and faithful servant." Because Jesus has gone before us to be for us; because Jesus has promised to never leave us nor forsake us; because Jesus has all authority and power in heaven and on earth; because Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to live in us to equip us and empower us as his disciples; because Jesus has saved us by his finished work of living a perfect life, suffering and satisfying the wrath of the Father, dying our death on the cross and being raised again to life after life after death; because he gave this all to us freely, not based on any of our works since we are dead in our sins – we can live awake and ready for him today. We do that by faith. Faith in who the biblical Jesus of Nazareth is. Faith is what the biblical Jesus of Nazareth has done. Faith in what the biblical Jesus of Nazareth is doing. Faith in what the biblical Jesus of Nazareth will do – come again and usher in fully the kingdom of God to earth so that our prayer will finally and fully be answered – may your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. May we wait awake. May we wait ready. May we wait with great expectant and longing hope for the physical absence of Jesus to be over – for his full presence to make all wrong come untrue. There will be no more longing, no more waiting, no more distance; only presence, fulfillment and flourishing.

One of the best ways to train ourselves to stay awake and be ready is Sunday Sabbath keeping. Sunday is sabbath for most people. That is, it is the day when they do not work and when Christians gather together as the body of Christ in order to demonstrate Christ's love, grow in faithful discipleship and share the hope that they have. Amongst resting and being with family on this day, there is corporate worship. This corporate gathering is far more than simply a bunch of individuals and families coming together in one place. It is, as already mentioned, the becoming the body of Christ together. This becoming moves us from an individualist mindset to an "individual in community" mindset. This is important because it trains us to not just think of ourselves, but others and our vital connection with them in Christ. These really are brothers and sisters of ours – family! Furthermore, it trains us to value our participation and responsibilities as members of the body of Christ. It orients us towards contributing to the welfare of the community with our God-given resources and God-given service-related gifts to "build up" the church. We need each other. We are interdependent on one another. In



a culture that tends to highly emphasize the value of the individual, this is a needed and counter-cultural practice. Additionally, gathering together centers us. It pulls us back into the gospel and kingdom and Jesus of Nazareth orbit. We tend to drift. Gathering is the gravity that pulls us back. We are reminded and rehearse that which is of supreme importance and valuable in this life as Jesus' disciples – worshipping him and orientating our whole being and doing towards him, in and through and by the Holy Spirit. We sing biblical songs of praise that declare God's worth and glory, who he is what he has done and our response to him. We read responsively Psalms that reach into our hearts and minds to reattach them to the story and drama of God's unfolding narrative. We give financially to practice being generous and to support ministry costs. We engage scripture to learn and grow in our faith and response to God in the daily activities we find ourselves in throughout the week. We partake of the Lord's Supper which is both a memorial of Christ and a participation in Christ. Communion unites us in Christ Jesus with one another. Cultural barriers are removed – black and white, rich and poor, young and old, male and female are all one, equal in the resurrected and ascended Jesus of Nazareth. Communion is also a means of grace that nourishes our soul. We pray and connect our lives to God's in response to what he is doing in the world and in us. We bare our soul, our heart and our mind with our faithfulness and our unfaithfulness. We confess and repent. We train ourselves in humility. We practice being before Jesus as is, with no pretense of falseness but with our struggles, fears, doubts and longings. More importantly, we proclaim the gospel, the good news of Jesus and we live out those truths with one another. We practice loving one another as Christ loves us. We are patient, kind, peaceful, joyful, good, self-controlled, loving and faithful to Jesus. We give witness both verbally and visibly to the reality of the kingdom of God as a contrast community to the empires of the world and as a foretaste of heaven to come. We gather because of who we are in Christ and we gather because who Christ is in us.

Think about not showing up to work or to a sports practice or game or class or drama rehearsal. How is that going to go over with your boss or coach or teacher? Not well if it becomes more than a rare occurrence. Why? Because you have responsibilities, commitments, skills and gifts to contribute and because you need to receive and learn and train and be built up by the skills and gifts of others. May we take Sunday Sabbath and showing up and participating with the serious business of joy! Yes. Waiting is hard because it means absence of something good, something valuable, something worth of our attention and our focus and our energy. But it will not last forever. Waiting one day will be over. Forever. May we in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit train hard at waiting well. May we make Sunday morning gathering for worship essential for our present and future wellbeing. May we remain awake and ready as we worship and shape ourselves more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus of Nazareth, our King who will, without a shadow of doubt return once and for all.

Above all, Sabbath keeping is a remembrance of and a participation with Jesus Christ. We practice being with Christ as we are with each other. Jesus is not just "out there" but also "in here," in you and in me through the Holy Spirit. Jesus of Nazareth truly is Emmanuel, God with us. As his disciples we are to live "with Jesus" lives. That means we are never alone – ever. And that makes a difference in our waiting. Waiting is always better with another person; someone you can talk to and pass the time with. Waiting with another can redeem the time, make the time not seem wasteful but invested in the development and expression of relationship. We will wait – a lot. But we don't have to wait alone. In



fact, we are not supposed to wait alone. We are to wait with Jesus. So, when you are waiting in line at the grocery store or at the traffic light or in the doctor's office, or for "that right person" or for the pandemic to "be over," recognize the presence of Jesus with you through the Holy Spirit – and listen and respond. In other words, converse. Recall scripture passages and stories and parables and people. Let God guide you in the conversation. This is life with Jesus. This is discipleship. Note well: Jesus of Nazareth is not only for us; he is also with us. May we wait well by waiting with Jesus. May waiting become something more than something we have to do. May it be something we get to do with Jesus. May waiting be something more than a waste of time; may it be redemptive time with Jesus. Sabbath grounds us, reorients us, focuses us on Jesus. That is what the gospel does. And each Sunday you here and participate in the gospel at least three times: through the songs sung, through the Word preached and through the Lord's Supper given. Let us make the most of every Sunday so that we will make the most of everyday by doing life with Jesus and waiting well. May the small things we wait for serve as a reminder of the big thing we wait for, Jesus' bodily second coming which can happen at any time, at any moment. Let us be awake and ready as we wait with Jesus through the ordinary and natural things of daily life so that they no longer are ordinary and natural, but extraordinary and supernatural. Practice being present with Christ at all times and in all circumstance so that no part of your life is done solo, alone or apart from him for his glory and our joy!

What are some ways you might remember the presence of Jesus in your life more consistently and regularly?

Share some stories of "with Jesus" times in your life and "without Jesus" times in your life. What kind of difference was there between these two experiences?

How has Sunday Services help shape you more into the image and likeness of Jesus?

How has Sunday Services helped you live a more "with Jesus" life?

Communion Meditation

Communion and the sermon are to always go hand in hand. As we reflect upon the Lord's Supper, may we remember that it is both a memorial of Jesus and a participation with Jesus. As it connects with the gospel message this morning, the Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the great banquet meal that we wait to partake of when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. It is about what we wait for, awake and ready! It is a sign and seal that what Jesus accomplished with his perfect life, substitutionary death and bodily resurrection and ascension was more than sufficient to save the world, including you and I by his gracious gift to us. Our faith in Jesus of Nazareth is evidence of this sufficiency as it points to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. Faith does not give rise to regeneration. Regeneration gives rise to faith. So may we faithfully engage with the Lord's Supper this morning as we wait for Jesus again, knowing that he is with us and will never leave us or forsake us and that he will come again as surely as he did the first time. Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!

Proclaiming: 1 Corinthians 11:23b-25 (Paraphrased)

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying, "this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal he took the cup of wine and pouring it out said, "this wine is my blood, a new covenant of grace poured out for the forgiveness of sins."

Remember and believe that the body & blood of Jesus was given & shed for the forgiveness of sins.



Participating

Extending -- the Table: Next time you eat, take notice of the food and drink and remember and believe that Jesus' body and blood was given and shed for the remission of all our sins! Remember that Jesus Christ was crucified, died and was buried for the forgiveness of my sins. He bore the eternal wrath of God that was meant for me. He died the death that was supposed to be my end. Remember that Jesus Christ was raised to new life, resurrection life and defeated death just as he defeated sin on the cross. Cross and tomb are empty. The resurrected and ascended Jesus of Nazareth is present through the Holy Spirit. And all this is ours as gift, by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

-What part of the gospel of Jesus Christ stands out for you this morning? _____

Song – This I Believe -- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-aSmurqrzA>

*Our Father everlasting
The all creating One
God Almighty
Through Your Holy Spirit
Conceiving Christ the Son
Jesus our Savior

I believe in God our Father
I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit
Our God is three in one
I believe in the resurrection
That we will rise again
For I believe in the name of Jesus

Our Judge and our Defender
Suffered and crucified
Forgiveness is in You
Descended into darkness
You rose in glorious life
Forever seated high

I believe in God our Father
I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit
Our God is three in one
I believe in the resurrection
That we will rise again
For I believe in the name of Jesus

I believe in You
I believe You rose again
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord
I believe in life eternal, I believe in the virgin birth*



*I believe in the saints' communion
And in Your holy Church
I believe in the resurrection
When Jesus comes again
For I believe, in the name of Jesus
I believe in God our Father
I believe in Christ the Son
I believe in the Holy Spirit
Our God is three in one
I believe in the resurrection
That we will rise again
For I believe in the name of Jesus*

Sending as Disciples of Jesus:

We gathered from various places (and at various places) to be the visible witness of the body of Christ, the Church. As we gathered, individuals became community. Individual families become one corporate family. We gathered to sing praises and lament together, pray together, read together, learn together, give together, engage communion together. And now we are sent back out, back to our homes, to our city, back to our places of work, school and play – our spheres of influence. We are sent out again as changed disciples of Jesus, nourished, equipped and empowered to live in such a way that we demonstrate Christ's love, grow faithfully in discipleship and share the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

May the power and beauty and scope of these words imprint on us the nature of the kingdom of God on earth today. May God the Holy Spirit give us the strength and courage to speak graciously and perform his wondrous deeds of love through weak vessels like ourselves, trusting that the kingdom of God is here and that it will blow us away when it fully arrives in Jesus Christ when he comes again! May we wait patiently with Christ, redeeming the time in and with him knowing that one day, he will bodily return and everything we could have ever wished for, hoped for, longed for in Christ will be made true!

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus. Therefore, as we are sent into the world by him, let us make disciples of all, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. And let us remember and treasure that Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age. Amen!