

Thomas R. Cook  
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The First Sunday of Advent; December 3, 2017

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## “Get On with It”

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Scripture: Mark 13:24-37; 1 Advent B RCL

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**[Enter the pulpit agitated and uncomfortable, nervous, dodgy. Rap fingers on the desk impatiently; ruffle papers, look around, and check your watch. *Ab! I have no watch.* Ask someone for the time. Continued tension and then...]**

I'm sorry. It's just that all this *waiting* and all this *watching* has got me so nervous. I know, I know... my being nervous doesn't accomplish a thing. But you do the math, and it's been around 2,000 years at this point, and I see no sign of him, no sign that he is any closer today than he was than yesterday, or that he's any closer in 2017 when Donald Trump is president of these United States than he was in 1017 when Cnut the Great was king in England. Yes, Cnut!

So what's the deal? I mean, the fact is that the Christians in the days soon after Jesus crucifixion apparently expected him to show up again, then and there, but this time he wouldn't be coming as “Mr. Nice-Guy.” No, this time he would be the big guy. He would be the judge; he would reward his followers and punish his enemies. And the world wouldn't stand a chance. The sun and moon would go out. The stars

would fall. And the heavens would shake at the presence of the one to come. Nowhere to hide. What a day! What a day for being nervous. You see why I'm a little nervous now? Advent is that time of year when I sometimes wear my little lapel button that says: "Jesus is coming. Look busy!" Why doesn't he just get it over with? What are we waiting for? What is he waiting for?

Well, all this time we Christians are supposedly watching for Jesus, maybe he's watching for us. Think about it like this... Say the two of us are stranded at the terminal at JFK in New York City waiting for the plane to come along to get us to where we need to go, say back to Minneapolis. And say the plane hasn't met its appointed schedule. But I say: "Not to worry. It will be along directly." So we take a seat and wait. In the meantime, maybe some other planes come by our gate, just not the one we're looking for. So we stay put. And the people clear out, and the terminal grows kind of quiet. "Surely, our plane will be here directly," I say. And we remain there on our duffs. ...No plane. And the gate attendants suggest we reroute our flight. But, no thanks, we say, we'll just wait and watch. Starting to get hungry now, night is on the way. Our families need us at home. But we stay put. Getting sleepy now. And the gate attendants say they don't know when there will another plane to MSP, and they go on home. But we will watch for that plane. It's way past bedtime and the hope of dinner at home is an old memory. But we'll just sit here. The plane is coming, after all.

Well, is that like what is meant by “watching” in Advent? Doing nothing when we could be doing something? Don’t you think that eventually we will need to get on with things? Maybe reroute those flights on a plane we can see. Or rent a car. Something? Anything? I don’t have to lose hope that a plane will ever come again in order to know that just sitting there watching isn’t helping much of anything. Time to get on with it.

Well, if we really expect the Lord to come again, people, wouldn’t you think every Christian would be seeking ways to live holy and godly lives? All the time? Wouldn’t we be about that business continually? Or would we fall victim to the impatience of our times and the apparent unfulfillment of a very ancient prophecy and just give up our expectations for a new world where we – do – better by each other? We don’t have to lose hope that Jesus is returning in order to get on with the work shaping our lives in holy and godly ways and building that new world. Maybe we can be even more motivated to build that world around us because we look for Jesus to come again... whenever!

So, just four weeks now to Christmas. But this is Advent. If you came here today looking for a babe in a manger, you won’t find it. And if you came here today hoping to sing some comforting Christmas tunes, you won’t hear them. And if you came here today to see a giant Christmas tree, well... *well, actually you can see a giant*

*Christmas tree today. But there are no lights or decorations on it! It's just there taking up space.*

What I'm trying to say is that Advent is not about the birth of the Christ child but about the coming of the one we trust to be our judge. Advent is the time of year when we check the morning news --- stealth fighters moved to South Korea; did the President obstruct justice?; maybe the tax plan will help, but maybe it will hurt a lot of us --- and we realize... we really need you to come again, Jesus. And surely we can keep watch, but I'm not so sure we can just wait. After all, it's been some 2,000 years. I don't think I can blame anybody if they thought maybe he wasn't coming back again. But that's not what I believe. *I believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.* And I'm going to go on trying to believe that to Kingdom come.

Look, I don't expect us to solve all our own problems. I fully accept the need of our Savior to set things to right through us, by us, with us, and, ultimately, for us. I don't know how all that will come about or when. But I expect that these days in which we live, these nervous days of tension and terror and distress and uncertainty, these days are the very canvas upon which is painted the story of our salvation. We have an opportunity not only to watch, but to work for God. Why should God hasten judgment when humanity has much it can do in its own right to help address what ails our world, to reach out to those in need, to learn to pray patiently and live

peaceful lives, to learn what Jesus meant when he said, “Follow me”? We won’t resolve all the problems of this mortal and finite life, but in living faithfully, we may well become just a little more human, and a little more godly: a little more like Jesus, that is, who brought those two things together in that baby in Bethlehem. And how might Jesus call us to be about the work of waiting for him? From his life, we see these things:

- Live simply.
- Do not succumb to worry.
- Be content with what you have.
- Love God. Love others.
- Change the world.
- Care for the poor, the outcast; be with those whom the world rejects.
- Give generously.
- Forgive those who harm you.
- Bless those who do you wrong.
- Confess those wrongs you do.
- Rest. Pray. \*

And I think we can do all that while we watch!

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\* Some of these headings and ideas are drawn from the work of Brian Taylor in Becoming Human: Core Teachings of Jesus (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2005).