

Sermon
St. Mary's Nanoose
November 27, 2016.
Matthew 24:36-44

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. The first Sunday in this special time of waiting. What are we waiting for? The birth of love in the world.

Like a pregnancy, we have some idea of how long we need to wait and what we're waiting for. But still there are many things we don't know. Who are we waiting for? What will they be like? How we will respond to them? How will life, as we know it, change? There are many questions. And we take time to ponder them. We wonder at the miracle of creation. We marvel at its power. We think about those who have come before us, and waited, just as we are waiting now.

As we progress through this time of waiting, we need to take care of ourselves. We need to eat well and get enough sleep. We need to get enough exercise. Because as we take care of ourselves, we are, in a very real way, taking care of someone else.

As in a pregnancy, during the time of waiting, we are also aware that something is changing and growing within us. So while we don't exactly know what is happening, we become attuned to our interior life, and notice changes. We know life is taking its course. We know we are the vehicle through which it is expressed. We take time to contemplate and marvel.

As we engage in all these ways, we feel HOPE. Incredible hope. We have dreams for how the day will arrive, how new life will emerge, how we will express it the best way possible, and be the best

person we can be. We know our lives will be different but we can't exactly imagine how. We are waiting, we are preparing, and it can alternately exciting and scary. And we hold all these experiences, thoughts and dreams in our hearts in expectation. Not knowing the time or day, but knowing and trusting that that special day will arrive.

Or..... we can allow Nature to take its course. Not wondering, not noticing, not caring, not even really participating. We sleep through the time of anticipation; the time of preparing ourselves, our minds and bodies and spirits for the transformation.

When our children were young, we hired the daughter of one of our employees to babysit our children. I'll call her Lily. Lily was a vivacious teenager – bright, talented, funny. She was the captain of her soccer team and on the honour role. Her parents were obviously very proud of her. And our boys loved her. After she graduated, we didn't see her anymore and her mom rarely mentioned her. And then her mom left our employ. A few years later, we bumped into Lily's mom and learned that Lily had fallen in with the wrong crowd and was using heroin. We were stunned and incredibly sad. Then a couple of years later, we bumped into Lily's dad and he told us this story. Lily had become pregnant and the family prepared by organizing the immediate adoption of the baby. Lily was couch surfing, still using drugs, and in no way fit to raise a child. Moreover, she wasn't even interested in becoming a mom. Her pregnancy progressed without excitement. Lily wasn't really involved. She didn't feel hope or excitement. She didn't care.

The day arrived when Lily went into labour. Her parents arrived at the hospital. And the baby was born. And was whisked

away. Lily asked to see the child. It was a boy. She held him. **And she woke up.** Lily fell in love with that child and in that instance, her life changed. She stopped using drugs because she knew if she did, she would lose that boy; and he was the light of her life. Life wasn't all roses after that. Lily had some hard work to do. But she managed to do it.

Jim and I finally bumped into Lily ourselves a couple of years ago at a birthday celebration for her dad. She was in her thirties. She introduced us to two boys, about 7 and 10. You could tell she'd had some hard years but she was radiant and her sons looked happy and mischevious.

In today's reading from Romans, Paul tells us that "now is the moment for you to wake from sleep because salvation is nearer than before." The theme in many of my sermons over past weeks has been this idea of "waking up." And today the idea in Scripture for this Advent season is to wake up to this time of waiting. To be fully present to this pregnant time. Knowing, trusting and hoping in the new life to come. Consenting to this promise of new life and actively engaging by listening, watching, anticipating. Allowing the knowledge of what lies at the end of waiting – the hope that new life brings – to inform how we live today.

Waiting is not the absence of activity. Just as silence is not an absence of sound. Waiting can engage our whole being as we listen for the Spirit and allow change within us to gestate. Waiting takes discipline. Forcing change can have negative results. Just think of a darkroom where in the past, photographs were developed from

negatives. It was important to wait for the image to develop in the solution. You couldn't hurry the process or you would lose the image.

We have been created in the image and likeness of God. And to show us what this image and likeness are like, God has sent into our midst the person of Jesus. Each year we wait. We wait anew for his arrival in order to allow the miracle to gestate inside us in deeper and more profound ways. Every year we remember and wait. Every year we try and stay awake, pay attention to the signs, and allow love to grow in us and change us. Every year, in these shortening days we work to do as Paul encourages us - to put "aside the works of darkness and put on the amour of light." With the light, in the light and for the light, we wait. Patiently. Impatiently sometimes. But we wait, actively,

The psalmist today reminds us that peace is ours. It dwells within us. And so we add the idea of peace to our waiting. For the psalmist also said, "for the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."

These four weeks before Christmas can be the opposite in this culture. They can be frenetic. They can draw our attention outwards to a disproportionate degree. We have to consciously work to find the peace within and extend it to those around us and keep our eyes on the prize. For the season of Advent, we are a waiting people. We are waiting, secure in the hope that what has been born, what will be born, and what is forever being born, is Love among Us.

Let us wait patiently and expectantly together.

Amen.