

**Texts: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36**

**What are you waiting for? That was the message of Black Friday, actually Gray Thursday. If you wait, you'll be late. Get out there and get shopping.**

**Why wait until tomorrow? Why wait for anything? We live in a 24/7 world. We expect instant answers, instant service. You don't have to wait for a letter or even a phone call. Think about what you do when the computer beeps or the phone rings and an email or a text message appears. I'll bet you stop whatever else you are doing to look at and respond to the message.**

**You don't have to wait for a store to be open anymore. You can place an order from a catalog over the phone or on line at any hour of the day or night. You don't have to wait to check your bank balance or your retirement account. The financial markets never close.**

**You don't have to wait for the newspaper to arrive anymore. You can read the news on your computer or watch it on TV all day and all night. And when something newsworthy is not actually taking place, you can watch commentators chew over the non-news.**

**You don't even have to spend even an hour cooking a meal anymore. In the microwave, it takes a matter of seconds.**

**So why wait through these four Sundays of Advent? Why not get on with celebrating Christmas now? I think that part of the reason we are so anxious to get everything done now is that we are afraid that there won't be time enough.**

**As the first Advent candle burns, let's return to the words of Jeremiah: The days are surely coming, says the Lord..."**

**Jeremiah was a witness to the destruction of Jerusalem by the invading army of Babylon. He watched as people starved to death in a city that was under siege. He watched as foreign soldiers killed people in the streets. He watched as the king and priests and many of the citizens were marched off to exile in a foreign land. Where do you turn when everything you know, everything you are familiar with, has been destroyed?**

**It is into that very place of destruction and despair that Jeremiah comes with a word of promise: The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise that I made...I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David. Jeremiah wrote these words 600 years before the birth of Jesus. He was talking about the restoration of the throne of King David. Christian interpreters looked back at these ancient words and understood them to be about Jesus.**

**Six hundred years from the time that Jeremiah wrote these words to the time that Jesus was born and lived and promised that he would return. And 2,000 years since then. And we still live with fear and anxiety. We ourselves have seen cities bombed and burned. London. Dresden. Hiroshima. Kandahar. Beirut. Paris. We ourselves have seen buildings fall to the ground. We look at places of conflict – Syria, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Ukraine – and we wonder how long we have to wait for there to be an end to the violence.**

**Maybe it's not the destruction of a city that brings on the anxiety. Maybe it's the destruction of a relationship. Maybe it's the struggle over a diagnosis. Maybe it's the loss of someone you loved. Maybe it's the wondering whether your children or grandchildren will be able to have good jobs and own their own houses.**

**We have become impatient people. We don't want to wait. We want action now. Waiting makes us anxious. Everything around us, our entire culture, is screaming at us to get busy, to get out there and shop, decorate, party, cook. Get busy. Fill that anxiety with stuff. Get that tree up, get those presents wrapped. Hurry up. Time's a-wastin'. What are you waiting for?**

**What *are* you waiting for? Because Advent is about waiting. Here in the northern hemisphere, the days are getting shorter. It's a time for plants and animals to slow down, lie dormant, hibernate, migrate. The ground freezes. Water freezes. Here in this part of the country, we actually are familiar with waiting for a crop to grow, for livestock to mature. It doesn't happen overnight.**

**Did you know that Advent is the beginning of the church year? So today is New Year's Day. But it is not like that day in January, where we make resolutions and get busy with exercise or self-improvement or cleaning out the closets. No. On this New Year's Day, we are called to do nothing but wait. Advent is the time between dying and being born. Advent is the time between the already of Christ's reign, and the not yet of Christ's birth. Advent is the time between two comings – God coming to earth in the infant Jesus and Christ returning to earth at a time that we do not know. And because we do not know, there is nothing to do but wait.**

**Advent is a season to learn how to live in this in-between time. Advent teaches us to wait for Jesus to be born, and also to be aware of his presence among us.**

**Advent is a time of promise. Advent teaches us to wait for God's promise to be fulfilled in Jesus' birth, and at the same time to be aware that God's promise is fulfilled**

**every single day in the midst of our eventful and unpredictable and sometimes fearful world.**

**Advent is a time of imagination. “In those days and at that time, says the Lord, the righteous branch of David shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” Not self-righteousness, but God’s righteousness. Can we imagine that day of justice and righteousness? Can we imagine a time when every single person who lives has enough to eat? Can we imagine a time when every single person can live without fear of violence? A time when every single person is welcomed and valued for who they are, can live to become fully the person that God created them to be?**

**Advent is a time of hope. Hope that keeps us going when the path ahead is far from clear. Hope that there is a sacred and holy presence even in the midst of the violence and the ashes, even in the midst of loss and despair. Advent calls us to the hope that life rises from death. Hope that the child whose birth we wait for will come again into our hearts and into our homes, into this bleak and broken world.**

**Advent is a time of patience. Advent gives us pause. Pause to imagine how to live patiently in a world of impatience. To imagine how to live in this in-between time. This is the time that we wait for the birth of Christ, knowing that he was born 2,000 years ago.**

**I want to read a poem to you, called Advent Credo by Daniel Berrigan:**

**It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss—  
This is true: For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life;**

**It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty,  
death and destruction—**

**This is true: I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.**

**It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever—**

**This is true: Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, his name shall be called wonderful councilor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of peace.**

**It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world—**

**This is true: To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and lo I am with you, even until the end of the world.**

**It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers—**

**This is true: I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.**

**It is not true that our hopes for liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this earth and for this history—**

**This is true: The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshipers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.**

**So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ—the life of the world.**

**Pause and take a breath. Take time this Advent season to enter into the waiting.**

**Without anxiety, and without impatience. Experience the holiness of the right now.**

**O come, O come Emanuel, God-With-Us. The days are surely coming, says the Lord. That is a promise worth waiting for.**