What Are We Waiting For?
Lake Street Church
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In the Christian liturgical year, we are in the season of Advent – Advent, from the two Latin words *ad venire*: to come to or to come towards.

Advent is a four-week time of preparation, a time of waiting as we look towards Christmas, the celebration of the union between the divine and the human.

In the words of St. Athanasius, fourth century bishop and theologian, “God became man so that men might become gods.”

The Divine and the human blend together.

I suggest, however, that the first Christmas was not the first time that humanity and divinity intermingled.

It has always been so. Christmas is simply the Christian realization and celebration of that reality.

There has always been the suspicion – in the words of Pierre Theilhard de Chardin – that, “We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a physical experience.”

We are human. And we are divine.

Whatever that reality may be, we now find ourselves here in the season of Advent.

And we are waiting…
So what are we waiting for?

Jesus of Nazareth did not want to wait.

The Gospel of Mark, chapter 13, has Jesus saying: “They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send his angel, and will gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. I say to you that this generation shall not pass away until all these things be done.”

According to Jesus, the waiting time is very short. The Kingdom of God will arrive before his generation dies…

St. Paul – a contemporary of Jesus – says the same thing in even more dramatic fashion.
I Thessalonians 4:
“The Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.”

But for Jesus of Nazareth, and for Paul, the end-time did not come, and their generation died—and many, many generations died after them.

So we are still waiting.
But what are we waiting for?

Perhaps we should not be waiting.
Perhaps waiting is the wrong attitude.

Or perhaps we have the wrong attitude about waiting.

The Buddhist teacher Tich Nhat Hanh has a suggestion about waiting. He says:
“When we see a red light or a stop sign, we can smile at it and thank it, because it is helping us return to the present moment.
The red light is a bell of mindfulness.
We may have thought of it as an enemy, preventing us from achieving our goal.
But now we know the red light is our friend, helping us resist rushing, and calling us to return to the present moment where we can meet life with joy and peace.”

And perhaps, if we follow Tich Nhat Hanh’s advice, that seemingly interminable red light won’t raise our blood pressure quite so much…

Another Buddhist teacher, Lama Surya Das, offers this unusual suggestion:
“Pick the longest line at the checkout counter, breathe slowly and smile at the frustrated customers. Slow down and give others the gift of presence. This simple act can be quite powerful.”

So waiting, he says, is more than being passive…

Let’s try on a quote from the spiritual writer Shauna Niequist. She says:
“Today is your big moment. Moments, really.

The life you’ve been waiting for…is happening all around you.

The scene unfolding right outside your window is worth more than the most beautiful painting, and the crackers and peanut butter that you’re having for lunch are as profound, in their own way, as the Last Supper.

This is it.
This is life in all its glory, swirling and unfolding around us, disguised as pedantic, pedestrian non-events.

Your life, right now, today, is exploding with energy and power and detail and dimension, better than the best movie you have ever seen. You and your family and your friends and your house and your dinner table and your garage have all the markings of a life of epic proportions, a story for the ages.

Because...they are all there is. Every life is.

You have stories worth telling, memories worth remembering, dreams worth working toward, a body worth feeding, a soul worth tending, and beyond that, the God of the universe dwells within you, the true culmination of super and natural.

You are more than dust and bones. You are spirit and power and image of God. And you have been given this day.”

Perhaps we do not need to wait.

Perhaps what we are waiting for is already here…

Back in 2012, the actor Dennis Quaid starred in a movie called “At Any Price,” a film about a farm family and its daily life.

The Dennis Quaid character has an affair, an affair that destroys his marriage. When his wife confronts him, she says simply-and movingly-and profoundly – “Why can’t you love what’s right in front of you?”

Why can’t we love what’s right in front of us? What are we waiting for?

We are sometimes – perhaps too often – blind to what is right in front of us.

Here’s an example:
Some years ago, my wife and I visited Paris. With my camera in hand, I took picture after picture, marveling at the beauty of the city. I came home with over 800 photos of Paris.

A few weeks later, we were in downtown Chicago about to take the riverboat architectural tour. As I stood in line, I noticed several quaint restaurants across the river, with colorful awnings and ivy-covered walls. I turned to my wife Lou and said, “If we were in Paris, I’d take a picture of that…”

But I was in Chicago, and I neglected to love what was right in front of me…

There is a website called “Tiny Buddha – Simple Wisdom for Complex Lives.” Its creator, Lori Deschene, writes:
“Most of us are really good at finding reasons to wait. We wait to call good friends we miss because we assume we’ll have plenty of time.

We wait to tell people how we really felt because we hope it will someday feel safer.

We wait to forgive the people who’ve hurt us because we believe they should reach out first.

We wait to apologize for the things we’ve done because we feel too stubborn or ashamed to admit fault.

If we’re not careful, we can spend our whole lives making excuses, holding off until a better time, only to eventually realize that time never came.

It sounds morbid to acknowledge that our days are limited, and it’s scary to realize that none of us can ever know how many we have.

But we can know that in our final moments, it’s unlikely we’ll say, “I wish I’d waiting longer,” or “I wish I stayed angry longer,” or “I wish I played it safe longer.”

Most of us will get to the end of our lives and wish we had said more: “I’m sorry.” “I forgive you.” Or, “I love you.”

Of course, there’s another option: we can say those things right now.

This moment is our only guaranteed opportunity to be thoughtful, compassionate, understanding, forgiving, and kind to the people we value.

What have you been meaning to do or say – and what are you waiting for?”

Wow! That stings, doesn’t it…

I think we all see ourselves in what Lori Deschene says.
I know I do.

To some extent, we are all guilty.
Or, if guilty is not the word, we are all challenged…

But wait…

Jesus of Nazareth did not simply wait for the coming of the kingdom.
He made it happen.
He preached, cared for the sick, and soothed those possessed by their demons.

When John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus: “Are you the one who is come, or shall we wait for another,” Jesus replies: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them.”
Jesus loved what was right in front of him.

And he told us that when we do the same, the Kingdom of God is within us and among us...

For Jesus of Nazareth, this is not the time of waiting.

Instead, the New Testament in its original Greek language proclaims that this is the time of kairos.

_Kairos_ means the right time, the opportune time.
It means _now._

Henry Nouwen, one of the 20th century’s great spiritual teachers, said:
_“The spiritual life is a life in which we wait, actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.”_

Rumi, the Sufi poet and mystic, wrote about our human condition, about giving up control, and about welcoming the opportunities that come each day.

He says:

_This being human is a guest house._
_Every morning a new arrival._
_A joy, a depression, a meaness, some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor._

_Welcome and entertain them all._
_Even if they are a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house empty of its furniture, still, treat each guest honorably._

_He may be clearing you out for some new delight._

_The dark thought, the shame, the malice._
_Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in._
_Be grateful for whatever comes._
_Because each has been sent as a guide from beyond._

This being human is a guesthouse – a temporary lodging.
This being human is also being divine.
This being human is being aware and willing and loving, especially for those people right in front of us.
So, what are we waiting for?