

**December 1, 2024 – 1st Sunday in Advent – Revd Jaap Haasnoot
Anglican Church Arnhem & Nijmegen**

Readings: Jer 33.14-16, Ps 25.1-9, 1 Thess 3.9-end, Luke 21.25-36

Theme: Wait for the Lord

[introduction]

Commercially minded people have a knack for sniffing out opportunities to make money. By now, we're all used to Christmas being overshadowed by the pressure to buy more food, bigger presents, and shinier decorations. To a lesser extent, the same is true for Advent, as you can see from the sheer variety of Advent calendar products on offer.

In her inspiring booklet on [Advent](#), Tish Warren mentions the rise in Advent Calendar sales in the US. She says: ... this traditionally penitential season now brings us untold branding options, including the Lego Harry Potter Advent Calendar, the Barbie Advent Calendar and, for an elite set of people, the [Tiffany & Co. Advent Calendar](#) (\$112,000).

But what Advent calendars are really meant to remind us of is: Advent is a season of patience, anticipation and waiting... And that brings us to today's readings.

[Questions]

Advent is about past, present and future. We wait with Israel in the past, we wait for Christ in the present and we wait for his final coming in the future. So how do we do that, waiting? It is not something that our culture appreciates much. How can this time of Advent be meaningful to us? The readings on this first Sunday of Advent give us direction.

- Psalm 25 is our **basis**: 'Lead me in your truth, you are the God of my salvation, I **wait** for you all day long'.
- Jeremiah 33 then gives us an **assurance**: 'The days are surely coming says the Lord when I will **fulfill the promise** I made to Israel'
- In 1 Thess. 3 we find (secondly) a **prayer**: May the Lord make you abound in love for all & strengthen your hearts in holiness
- And Luke 21 gives us in the third place an **exhortation** to be alert at all times, for us to be ready when the Son of Man returns.

[Texts]

Let's briefly look at our readings with this focus: Advent as a time of waiting with an assurance, a prayer and an exhortation.

Psalm 25 is a psalm for guidance and deliverance. The author David is in need of God's direction (*Make me to know your ways, O Lord*) and there are many outside pressures that he has to deal with (*Consider how many are my foes..*). What does he do in those circumstances? He trusts in the Lord and He waits for Him to act. Other translations say in verse 5: I put my hope in you. That might be not what we naturally will do when we are in need of guidance and experience pressure: to wait, to sit still, to trust that God will show us the way and deliver us.

And that is what Advent is for: to give us 4 weeks to practice waiting and patience. Tish Warren writes:

'Advent is a way to practice faith-and-hope formed waiting. It's a way to begin the year explicitly foregrounding not our own plans, goals, success, or achievements, but the destiny God has written for his creation and for all humanity'. (p. 29)

1. That waiting starts with the **assurance** from Jeremiah 33 that God has not forgotten his people. They messed up, they had broken the covenant with the Lord but He will still fulfill his promises to them: 'I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land'. This promise was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, and will be again fulfilled when He will return to bring justice and righteousness to this earth.

Sometimes it is not easy to be assured that God is in control and that He has not forgotten his promises when we look around in our world today. There is so much that is broken, maybe also in your personal life. Faith starts with the certainty that God **has acted** (He sent his Son for us) and that **He will act again** (put this world right).

2. Waiting also needs **prayer**. Again Tish Warren: ‘We come to God openhanded, holding our imperfect and incomplete lives before him. We need him to come to us, to rescue and restore us, even today, in our everyday lives’. (p. 16)

Paul prays for the church in Thessalonica that – while they are awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints – they abound in **love** for one another and for all, and that their hearts are strengthened in **holiness**.

Paul’s focus here is on **community**: fostering love for one another and living a holy life rooted in the apostles’ teaching. His vision is for a community that reflects the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ in all they do.

So Advent is a time for us to be **united in prayer**, to make sure that there is no disunity amongst ourselves and to be ready for that day when Jesus returns.

3. And that is exactly what our Gospel emphasizes: an **urgent call** to be ready and to be alert for the signs. This passage might sound intimidating, with its talk of confusion among nations, people fainting from fear, and the shaking of the powers of heaven.

Yet for Christians, the promise of Jesus’ return is profoundly hopeful. It assures us that beauty, goodness and joy will ultimately prevail, while fear, sin and death will be no more.

This hope doesn’t call for passivity. Time and again, the Bible urges us to be ready for when Jesus returns, to actively live in a way that reflects Jesus’ example – caring for those in need, speaking words of grace and encouragement, and standing firm against injustice.

Tish Warren (one last time): ‘The final return of Christ is the undoing cancer. It is the utter dismantling of white supremacy and racism. It is the delivery of justice for the victimized... It is the regeneration of dead coral reefs. It is the end of global pandemics. [-] It is the weeping of children giving way to their eternal laughter. It is the death of death.’ (p. 21).

[Take away]

So how can we put this ‘Advent-waiting’ into practice in the coming weeks? It is finding the right balance between resting in the promises of God and actively living out the example of Jesus and the apostles’ teaching. Following the three points, let me suggest a few things:

1. Read the passage from **Jeremiah 33** again this week (or another prophecy about the coming of the Messiah) and underline the words that especially speak to you. How does this promise give you hope for today?
2. Find extra time to **pray** this week. Pray for our church, for your community, for your family, for yourself: that the hope of Advent and the Light of Christmas may shine brightly, bringing warmth and clarity to all for whom you pray. And you could join the online evening prayers that are on offer (I am saying this to myself).
3. The **exhortation** to be on our guard and to be alert is not to frighten us or to make us paranoid but it is an invitation to do the work of the Kingdom. To be in the light and not in the dark. How can we help someone this week or offer words of encouragement to someone who needs them?

[Finally]

Let me summarize this in a perhaps unexpected way - through a children's story: [Waiting is not Easy by Mo Willems](#). It is a picture book, so ideally, we'd have the illustrations, but for now, we will have to do with the storyline.

The book tells the story of Gerald (an elephant) and his best friend, Piggie (a pig.) One day, Piggie announces she has a surprise for Gerald. He is excited. He asks: *Is it big? Yeah. Is it pretty? Yes! Can we share it? Yes! I cannot wait!*

But then Piggie reveals a catch - they must wait for their surprise. What follows is a rollercoaster of emotions. Gerald is initially determined, but his excitement quickly turns into impatience, frustration and even anger as the wait feels endless. He grumbles: *We have waited and waited and waited and waited! And for what?!*

Finally, the moment arrives. As the sun sets and the sky darkens, Piggie points upward to the surprise: a breathtaking view of the stars.

Gerald, now awestruck, declares: *This was worth the wait*. Piggie smiles: *I know*.

Amen