

24th Sunday after Pentecost Christ church 2023

Have you ever waited for a life changing event? Something you were really looking forward to. Your wedding day, your retirement day. Acceptance letter from your dream college. The arrival of your first baby, or perhaps a dream vacation.

Do you remember the waiting? Was it all joyful anticipation? Anxious, or even scared as the time of the event drew near? How do you wait and prepare for special occasions X2?

About every two years, my family makes a trip back home to Tanzania. Going home is always an exciting occasion. We can't wait to visit with family and friends. We can't wait to share stories and laughter, and to share tasty meals with familiar aromas.

This year as we planned to go home, I had extra excitement. I couldn't wait to see the many projects that Christ Church has sponsored. I was looking forward to seeing the water project, the sewing program, Sunday school, and the three new buildings we have helped to construct.

Last time I visited, there were no floors, no pews, no altar, no windows. I was looking forward to seeing the new pews and painted walls.

Although going home is always exciting, the excitement turns into anxiety the closer I get to the departure date. Preparations can be overwhelming. I have to think about air tickets, presents to take home, the medications for anti-malaria, and other vaccinations! Etc.

But I have come to learn that the best way of waiting is early preparations. Preparations and planning reduce stress and anxiety. We are getting closer to the end of the church year. Mother church uses the Sundays before advent, to remind us about Jesus' second coming. The theme before Advent is "Be ready and prepare". Be ready for the bridegroom. Keep awake! Be ready for the kingdom of God.

In the gospel story this morning ten bridesmaids are invited to a wedding. Apparently they were supposed to wait for the bridegroom. In that culture the waiting was for the groom not the bride! Strange! The wedding party could not start until the bridegroom arrived. We are told the bridegroom showed up at midnight!

Apparently the five wise bridesmaids took all the precautions. They had prepared for the late arrival of the bridegroom. When he showed up, they were ready. They joined the wedding party in the banquet hall, and the doors were locked. The other five maidens were not prepared. They ran out of oil and had to scavenge for oil in the area. By the time they got to the wedding banquet, it was too late. The doors had been locked.

They were not allowed in. They were told by the Lord that he didn't know them.

This story feels a little harsh. We all forget and overlook some details. Don't we! Those poor maidens forgot one important detail. After all the bridegroom bears some blame. He was late! Why such harsh punishment.

Well, we can look at this story and focus on the harsh punishment. This could be seen as a deterrent to never make mistakes. God is watching and will punish you harshly. But we can treat this story not as a punishment story but a reminder story to prepare.

When those wise maidens were getting ready for the wedding, they were getting ready not because of the fear of punishment. They were getting ready because they looked forward to the banquet.

We too are reminded to get ready not because of the fear of eternal damnation but because we look forward to beholding God's glory. We look forward to encounter Jesus. We look forward to eternal life.

The question is, how do we get ready? What do we do as we wait? Do we even think about getting ready?

The disciples were looking forward to the second coming of Christ. In fact, they were assured of his return before their lifetime. But we know that the day didn't come soon enough. The people who were waiting in anticipation for Jesus' coming started dying one after another. The waiting turned into disappointment, which gave way to doubt, which finally gave way to indifference.

I wonder whether many of us today have become indifferent. How often do we think about the end of this world? Do we even care whether or not it comes in your lifetime?

Well, yes, we should not become indifferent. There will be the second coming. But the good news about the second coming is that it is already here! What we are waiting for is already here.

When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray he said: May your kingdom come, and may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Indeed, we wait for God's glory. We wait for the kingdom of God to come. But this waiting is not for the future but for the now. The end of time begins right here on earth. The earth is not a holding space for the next age. The earth is the place where the kingdom of God is initiated.

In the Old Testament reading, the prophet Amos, tells us what not to do as we wait. He brings a complaint from God against those who think they are ready, those who say they desire the day of the Lord.

He complains that they go about worshipping as they always have. They don't notice that their worship should propel them into action. Their worship was meant to be the catalyst of God's Kingdom in their midst. God says: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps".

That sounds harsh. Does God not love our beautiful liturgy? We do a great job here at CC. Does God not listen to the beautiful voices from our choir? But of course, God loves all that we do here.

The point that Amos is making is that our liturgy should propel us to act. Our liturgy should inspire us to make a difference in the world. The solemn assemblies should move us to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. Because what we are waiting for starts here on earth.

Doing justice is not easy. But I think that Christ Church is a faithful community working hard to let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. From the testimonies of those who spoke during the stewardship moment, it is obvious to me that we are trying to let justice roll down like water. Our outreach committee is hard at work of bringing hope to our neighbors.

I might be biased but I sincerely speak from my heart that, I have experienced God's love at Christ Church. I have seen the genuine effort of letting justice roll like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

And of course, nobody is perfect. No community is perfect. There is still a lot of work to do. Justice has not fully rolled down like waters. There is a lot of darkness in the world. The world continues to be a scary place for many.

But as we light our lamps, as we care for each other while we wait, an amazing thing happens. Our actions become the actions of Christ. Jesus comes! The Kingdom of God happens. It happens here on earth as it is in heaven.

And as we wait, a new world emerges right in our own congregation, right in our own community. As we wait, we begin to realize that Christ has come, and continues to come to us every day. He is not yet here in all his fullness, but Jesus is here, helping us to dream, to wait, to prepare, and to bring about God's kingdom here in our midst. Amen