

Advent is the season when God is coming, and we are waiting; the season when God is coming again to bring light & life to creation; the season when God is coming personally - in Jesus - to live with us and to heal us. Advent is the season when God is coming, and we we are waiting. *But not all waiting is the same, right?* There's a world of difference between waiting in a car that's going somewhere and waiting in a car that's stuck in traffic; between waiting in a plane that's hurtling toward some destination at 30,000 feet, and waiting in a plane that's stuck on the tarmac. Waiting is different when it's actually going somewhere.

But it's not just about how fast we're moving. Waiting is also different when there's a purpose. One of the interesting things about modern life is that we wait less than ever for more things than ever - yet all of our speed & convenience can actually make it harder to wait. The fact that we can have thousands of items shipped to our front door within 48 hrs. doesn't always make it easier to wait. Sometimes it just makes it harder. Because that kind of waiting doesn't really serve a purpose. It's just the gap between something we've paid for and getting it in our hands. It doesn't necessarily teach us how to wait with a purpose, it can just as easily reinforce the sense that we deserve it.

Advent is the season when God is coming, and we are waiting. And **our invitation on this 2nd Sunday of Advent is to reflect on how we're waiting God's arrival in our midst.** Where does our life feel stuck? Where do we feel like we have no purpose? Or, where in our life are we hurtling toward some destination,

but we're so caught up in the process that we're not even sure about the destination. Advent is the season when God is coming, and we are waiting.

Today John the Baptist invites us to see our waiting less like a distraction or an obstacle, and more like **preparation**. To use a not-so-random example, Advent is less like waiting for a purchase & more like waiting for the birth of a child. [For some of use that comparison is more personal than others...] This Advent Kendyll & I are literally waiting for the birth of a child. No one would make the mistake of thinking that we're already parents yet, but you can bet that waiting our isn't just a delay or an inconvenience. It's waiting with a purpose. It's going somewhere. Our lives have already changed. That's the kind of waiting we enter in the season of Advent.

And our waiting during Advent has a name. We're called to repent.

Repentance is the shape, and the purpose and the meaning of our waiting

during Advent. John cries out in the wilderness: *Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near*. Repent is literally a change of mind that leads to a change of action. It can literally mean turning around & going in a different direction.

Despite popular opinion, it has almost nothing to do feeling bad about ourselves. It has almost nothing to do with beating our breasts & mourning over our mistakes.

Those might be feelings that accompany our repentance, but repentance has less to do with our feelings and more to do with our direction. Repentance is going somewhere. Think about it like this. Over the past 7 months, Kendyll & I have had

to “repent” of all those lifestyle decisions that make it hard to welcome a baby. We’ve had to “repent” of keeping dangerous things too close to the floor. We’ve had to “repent” of having a dresser with no room for baby clothes. We’ve had to “repent” of not having a car seat, or diapers - or *so. many. other. things* that you need for a baby. There’s been almost nothing to feel sorry about, but almost everything to change or “repent” as we wait for the arrival of a little girl.

Today, John says: repent for the Kingdom of heaven has drawn near. He says, get ready. And our other Readings help us understand how to repent & to get ready for God’s kingdom. After all, if Advent is more like preparing for a baby, the most tragic thing would be preparing for something else; instead of buying diapers - buying a litter box; instead of buying a crib - just lining a cardboard box with some newspaper. We’re preparing for a child, not a pet, and it makes all the difference if we’re preparing for the right thing. That’s where our other two readings come in. If we’re going to repent we need to know what direction we’re heading. Isaiah & Romans help us find the meaning & direction in our waiting.

Isaiah invites us to get ready for God’s peace & harmony in all creation.

And that’s kind of a hard concept to get our heads around - God’s harmony, God’s peace, God’s wholeness, God’s shalom in all creation. Everywhere. Isaiah says, get ready, God’s harmony in creation will be so complete that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea,” (Isa. 11.9). That’s pretty complete. And it’s also pretty hard to get our heads around - almost like trying

wrap your mind around a new baby in your home... So Isaiah does something creative. Instead of trying to describe it literally; he describes it poetically. Instead of describing what it's like to change diapers, or to clip tiny fingernails, or to learn how to feed a flailing little creature - he describes the meaning; not the the details.

Because Isaiah's not trying to show us a photography of God's Reign. He's trying to help us to prepare. So he describes the most threatening parts of creation, and he paints a picture of the most destructive relationships being transformed into a place of harmony: the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the fatling together - oh, and a little child will lead them (Isa. 11.6). [Does that mean that kids are actually more capable than I think?] Isaiah's prophecy borders on the ludicrous but that's okay, because even though God's kingdom is hard to get our heads around (having a baby) that doesn't mean we can't get ready. Isaiah is inviting us not to prepare by what our eyes (currently) see or what our ears (currently) hear, but to prepare for God's arrival with a vision of harmony as the most fundamental thing in all creation. Repent [get ready] for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

And even though our world looks almost nothing like God's kingdom yet, you better believe that we're invited to get ready. We're invited to begin forming God's Reign in our community; right here in our midst. That's where the reading from Romans comes in. Today, right now, before the birth of Jesus at Christmas, **Paul invites us to get ready for the arrival of God's harmony, God's peace &**

God's wholeness (God's shalom) in our community; the church. If we're honest, that can be even harder to imagine than a wolf and a lamb living together. Church can be a beautiful place, and a challenging place. It can be a place of incredibly restorative & life giving relationships. It can also be a place of incredibly frustrating & fruitless relationships. It's always been that way. And yet, Paul invites us to prepare our church as place of harmony & a sign of hope for all creation.

Hope is a major theme of this passage in Romans. We hear that whatever was written in former days was written that we might have hope (Rom. 15.4). And then we hear Paul describe this community - the church - as a source of hope for one another & for the rest of the world. He says, "May the God of steadfastness & encouragement grant you to live in harmony," (Rom. 15.5). And they do it: by living "in accordance with Christ Jesus." That's the key. That's what we Christians call grace: we prepare for God's arrival using the gifts that God is already giving us. Grace allows us to prepare for God's arrival in our lives. Xsitan life is almost always about what God is doing for us, instead of what we think we're doing for God. It's not about us. It's about God's gifts & God's grace. Paul's great climax is this: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy & peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit," (Rom. 15.13).

Advent is the season when God is coming, and we are waiting; the season when God is coming - again - to bring light & life to creation; the season when God is coming personally - in Jesus - to live with us & heal us. Advent is the

season when God is coming, and we we are waiting. But not all waiting is the same, right?

* There's all the difference in the world between waiting when your life is going somewhere, and when you feel utterly stuck. Where are the places in your life where you feel stuck? *Repent [get ready] for God's kingdom of new life has already come near.*

* There's all the difference in the world between waiting when your life has real purpose, and when you feel like you're just going through the motions and trying to keep your head above water. Where are the places in your life that have no direction or where it feels like maybe you're just spinning your wheels? *Repent [get ready] for God's kingdom of restoration & deep meaning has already come near.*

* There's all the difference in the world between waiting when you can afford it, and when you feel like you're in a place of despair. Where are the places in your life that are filled with pain & suffering? *Repent, [get ready] with hope and expectation for God's kingdom of healing has already come near.*

And if none of those things describe you, if you're not sure where to begin, then let's go back to John the Baptist; let's join the crowds with John at the river and allow him to point the way. John invites us to "bear fruit" and "do not presume." (Matt. 3.8,9). Let's not presume that we're already preparing for the right things. Let's not presume that our family history or familiarity with God is all

it takes. Instead let's bear fruit that's worthy of repentance. He says, bear fruit that looks like God's harmony & peace have already arrived. Let's bear fruit that looks & tastes like the arrival of God's harmony & peace here in our church. What parts of our lives make God's arrival actually sound like Good News? And wherever we find ourselves uncomfortable about the idea of God suddenly arriving - John's message is the same: Repent with anticipation & joy, for God's kingdom of hope, and healing, and justice has [already] come near. *Amen.*