

**“Still Waiting”**  
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**Delivered at Lakewood UMC, November 29, 2009**

Having a broken leg and a broken foot is as good an excuse as any to preach a sermon sitting down

- Some of the newer hipper preachers are doing this anyway, but I promise this isn't a trend I think you'll see too often here.

I think I've shared before that I'm not the world's most patient person. There's even a rumor that I was too impatient to go down a ladder the normal way.

Today's the first Sunday in Advent – you noticed we lit the first candle on our Advent Wreath, sang the first verse of the Advent Song.

If you have a Catholic or Episcopalian background you might know that Advent marks the BEGINNING of the Christian year, so really today is New Year's Day.

But for most of us, Advent meant that we noticed the banners and colors in church changed, the sanctuary got its seasonal decorations.

For us, it's just the countdown to Christmas, it whets our appetite for Christmas to be here.

As a kid I wasn't very patient waiting for Christmas either. In fact, I think it was the impatience of my brothers and I that caused my family to open almost all of our gifts on Christmas eve instead of waiting for Christmas morning. But I hope this Advent, you'll join me in diving into the waiting.

Let's use this season to identify with the hundreds of generations of people who have been waiting for God to do a great thing . . . finally . . . this year.

Let's listen now to the word of God:

Isaiah 40:3-5

Malachi 3:1-4

Mark 1:1-8

I'll bet some of you share my, uh gift, of impatience. Does anyone here also spend a lot of time picking out just the right line to get into at the bank or grocery store. Do you notice that you NEVER pick the right line. We seem to hate waiting, yet in some cosmic sense, we're condemned to it.

Christmas Story is my favorite Christmas movie. It focuses on a young boy, Ralphie, in the 1940's who desperately wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas . . .

Fred Craddock story about Oklahoma seminary gift.

The Bible is really a collection of stories about people who are waiting.

Waiting to be freed from captivity, waiting for justice, waiting for blessing. And as we just heard in the Old Testament readings, waiting for deliverance, deliverance in the form of a Messiah.

In the readings Julie/Amy just gave us we get a sense of that.

We heard a prophecy from Isaiah, really a plaintive cry to God to come and straighten out the world.

Experts tell us that Isaiah was really written in at least 3 parts, probably representing the preaching of 2 prophets, separated by a couple of centuries. The reading we just heard was from around 540 BCE, during the era of the Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah here is seeking to reassure the people that God has not forgotten them in their oppression and slavery, and will free and redeem them, if they'll just be patient,

And wait. Malachi is the last book found in our Old Testament and also the last book in Hebrew bibles, in the books known as the Minor Prophets.

Like many of the minor prophets, found at the end of the Old Testament, Malachi is primarily rebuking people for their unjust treatment of the poor, of being oppressors themselves.

Malachi foretells, like Isaiah, of a special revelation of God, to come. A new era which will bring peace and justice and end oppression.

A new day will dawn, with a Messiah sent by God. From Isaiah to Malachi, the OT scriptures are prophesying for, predicting, LONGING for a Messiah. The word Messiah literally means "annointed one". It was the term used in anticipation of the figure that would solve whatever crisis was facing the Old Testament people.

But they wanted a Messiah that fit their expectations, that fit their needs. When they were enslaved they wanted a messiah to lead them to freedom. When they were oppressed they wanted the "ANNOINTED ONE" to bring them justice.

When they were hungry, or at war, or suffering in some way, they looked for a Messiah that fit their needs, their wants, their preconceived notions. And that's how the Old Testament ends.

Watching and waiting, for the promised one, the annointed one, the Messiah.

If you've ever had a chance to read scripture through in the order it's contained in our Bible you learn something interesting – there's a definite flow and relationship between what we know as the Old Testament and the New Testament

And so we come to our New Testament reading today. The gospel of Mark is probably the earliest of the four Gospels contained in the New Testament, and most experts argue that both Matthew and Luke relied and expanded on its words.

And unlike both Matthew and Luke (and even John), Mark opens not with the Christmas story, not with genealogies and stories of Mary, but simply with prophecy being fulfilled.

Mark tells us that the voice in the wilderness from Isaiah, the messenger from Malachi, is being heard. Heard in John the Baptist, who is proclaiming the Messiah is here, the wait is over.

The years of watching, of longing, of waiting are fulfilled. But Jesus didn't fit the idea of what the Israelites were watching for, waiting for, even expecting.

You see, they were living under an increasingly oppressive Roman government.

They were looking for a Messiah who would lead them in overthrowing military dominance, not a Messiah who would talk to, befriend, even eat with Roman soldiers.

They wanted a Messiah who would kill Roman soldiers - not heal their children. They wanted a Messiah who would change an oppressive and corrupt system of tax collecting, not eat with tax collectors.

They looked for a Messiah who would bring a new purity to their religious systems, not socialize with sinners and prostitutes and overturn tables in the temple courts.

They were definitely waiting and watching for a Messiah, just not the one they got - at least not for most of them.

You know we do the same thing.

We say our Messiah has come, but so often we want Jesus to conform to our expectations, our wants, our desires.

So we create a Jesus who grants wishes, who makes us feel good, a Jesus who is meek and mild.

And the rest of the world still waits too. Waits for a Messiah (even if they don't use that word) who will solve their problems. World hunger should be ended, and war, and violence and injustice.

And not only do we not offer a Messiah that meets those needs, we as Christians don't even do a good job of modeling those qualities or meeting those needs ourselves.

That's really too bad. Because we are Christ to the world - that's our job as Christians.

But still the world waits. Still they cry out against oppression and slavery and violence and hunger.

But we can and should be offering hope, a glimpse of a new way of doing things, a revealing of the Messiah that John the Baptist was proclaiming,

We do that when we help neighborhood kids by taking tags from the tree in the narthex.

- Offer hope to families whose father or mother is in prison by hosting the Angel Tree party for Lakewood this Christmas
- When we sacrifice our time and resources to serve the needy here and across the country, when we take time to offer our music in praise to God, or teach Sunday school or host homeless families through IHN
- When we give of ourselves to benefit others, even if we might never see those being benefited.

You see, I think advent is here to remind us to prepare the way.

In a sense, we're John the Baptist, but our job is to proclaim the Messiah, the savior has come, and is here for the world in real, tangible ways.

As I was writing this message, I flashed back to a time a few years ago riding in a friend's car.

We came to a four way stop and there were cars backed up at each position.

My friend is probably even less patient than I am in traffic, and as each side was hesitating, and no one was moving, in his frustration he screamed, to no one in particular, "What are you waiting for - Christmas!"

I remember laughing at that phrase then. It may be more familiar to you than it was to me.

I looked it up on [urban dictionary.com](http://urban-dictionary.com):

They note it's a Question asked of someone that's taking their sweet time doing something.

So in conclusion, I ask you this Advent, "What are YOU waiting for, CHRISTMAS?"