

## Learning to Wait for God.

Text: Psa 25:1-4

Suggested hymns:

Tan: 733, 390, 7, 283, 603

Ade: 733, 877, 390, 7, 18

1) We ought to learn during Advent to wait for God

2) Sometimes we fail to be people waiting for God

3) Advent proclaims a God who comes

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 25:1-4, *<sup>1</sup> To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul. <sup>2</sup> O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me. <sup>3</sup> Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed; Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause. <sup>4</sup> Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Advent prayer is “*Come, Lord Jesus.*” But there are many ways to say, “*Come.*”

“*You simply must come by and see us sometime,*” you murmur when you don’t know what else to say to a hopelessly boring couple you meet at a party. You don’t mean a word of it, and they know it, so you’d practically faint if they ever stood at your front door. Christians should try to curb such insincerity, even when it is the socially acceptable thing to do.

Have you ever heard a distraught mother crying to call a doctor to the bedside of her sick child? “*Come!*” she screams, indifferent to politeness or formality. She is not thinking of anything but her need.

Our “*Come*” addressed to God is often so small! It is so much like a thoughtless, polite invitation rather than the passionate plea of necessity. Today’s Introit, like the whole of our Advent worship, is to stimulate us to be people wanting God, sensing our deep need for Him, waiting expectantly for Him to come to help us now in our battle against sin and the flesh. That is our theme for today: *Learning to Wait for God.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

## 1. We Ought To Learn During Advent To Wait For God

The Psalmist waits for God. We need to look more closely at our text for a sample of what it means to wait for God. This psalmist had an acute feeling of need for God. Listen to the striking expression he gives to his need, *To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul* he begins. What a picture!

Can you imagine a man, so broken by despair, that he stands stretching up on tip-toe to hold his desolate inner self up before God in his hands? He is like a child holding a shattered toy up to his father for repair. Do you yourself feel this kind of need for God?

*O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me.* This is a daring plea indeed. Can you imagine anyone being ashamed of God? Would you talk that way to the Lord God? Would you say, “*O Lord, I don’t want to have to be ashamed of You, so come and help me?*” The psalmist said just that. He had put all his eggs in one basket, and the basket was God’s promise. He was risking everything on his trust that God would respond to his plea for help. If God failed to come through, how ashamed he would be!

He could even picture his enemies staging a triumphant celebration and laughing over the broken wreck of the religious man who had counted on God instead of relying on his own resources, and lost. Here is a man who understood in the depths of his spirit the deep yearning that comes from a sense of need for God.

The purpose of Advent is to teach us to wait for God. It is to stimulate in us this sense of expectant waiting for the God who comes. Advent worship is geared to make us tense with expectancy. It seems strange, nowadays, that people would try to build up tensions on purpose. Usually we worry about “how to get rid of our tensions,” not how to cultivate new ones. “*Master Your Tensions and Enjoy Living Again*” is the title of just one of the many books written offering help to the harried, anxiety-ridden man or woman.

Now comes Advent, and we say to one another, “*Here is one tension we need to build up: the tension of yearning for God’s coming.*”

We often forget that some tensions are good. Remember how tension builds up around Christmas time, especially for children? They “*just can’t wait*” for the great day to arrive.

Sometimes when you feel a need to get away from it all, and the need drives you to load up your tackle and go fishing. You do it because your desire to go fishing amounts to a tension which you relieve by doing just that. That is a good tension. And so is the tension Advent worship builds up in us. It is good to sense our need for God.

So, how does Advent build our sense of need for God? Let us look at some of the tension-building devices in our Advent worship. When we first walked into the church this morning, we saw violet on the altar. Violet is the colour of penitence, the colour displayed to remind us of our sin and our need for God’s forgiveness. Let the violet of Advent make you think: “*How very much I need God!*”

The Collect for today teaches us to pray that Christ will stir up His power and come that “*we may be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins.*”

The Epistle is a regular alarm clock sounding in our ears to urge us to wake up and get ready for Christ’s coming. In many churches and homes, the Advent wreath hangs, and we build up a sense of expectancy by lighting another candle each week during the Advent season. All this is to help us to be ‘waiting people’ who want God to come because only God can rescue us from the plight our sins.

## **2. Sometimes We Fail To Be People Waiting For God**

Sometimes our sense of need for God ebbs low. Therefore we need the very thing Advent does for us. We do not always wait for God with the passionate sense of need we ought to feel.

*To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.* When we pondered those words in the Introit at the beginning of today’s service, did we really beg with passion that God would come to us? Or when we prayed in the Collect, “*Come to us, Lord, with Your saving power*” was this cry a bit half-hearted?

Sometimes our sense of need for God ebbs so low that the Gospel itself sounds dull and uninteresting to us. Then we can get more excited watching a

football player run fifty meters and kick a goal than when we hear the good news about Christ's coming to set us free.

The reason for this is because we become complacent about our sins. When we don't wait for God as the man in the psalm did, the reason is often that we have become complacent about our sins.

Today's Collect is a prayer begging for rescue from "*the threatening dangers of our sins.*" To many people it sounds down-right silly to talk about sins as "*threatening dangers.*" Shortcomings, yes; weaknesses, yes; mistakes, of course — we all make mistakes. But we are seldom bothered by the feeling that we might do anything which could drive a wedge between us and God.

When we hear about Luther's deep feelings of guilt before God, many of us wonder what he could have been talking about. And this is strange because we live in a time when many people feel guilty most of the time. Parents, for example, feel guilty about the way they are training their children. The "*experts*" have switched methods so often that they wonder, "*Maybe I should be doing what I'm doing; then again, maybe I should be doing just the opposite.*" And whatever they do, they have a nagging sense of guilt about it.

If you are sick and you stay home from work, you feel guilty for taking time off. If you go to work, you blame yourself for being at the office feeling the way you do.

Or take the way you use your spare time. If you use it to do church work, you feel guilty because you should spend more time with your family. If you are spending time on recreation, you feel guilty because the yard needs weeding. If you are working in the yard, you keep thinking, "*I really ought to be getting some recreation,*" and you feel guilty about that.

If some acquaintance doesn't seem quite as cordial today as he did yesterday, you wonder, "*Now what did I do to offend him?*"

How strange it is! So many today feel guilty about so much! Yet so little of this guilt brings us to face the fact that our sins are sins against God. We read in Psalm 51:4, ***' Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.*** He saw his guilt in its true perspective. And so will we, when we begin to see our sins as threatening dangers which can eat like acid at our relationship with God.

### 3. Advent Proclaims A God Who Comes

God comes to die for us. When the yearning theme of Advent finds a sympathetic response in our hearts, the Gospel of Advent sounds in our ears as thrilling good news. Advent means “coming.” The message of Advent is that God does come in response to our need for Him.

*Show me Your ways, O LORD; Teach me Your paths,* we begged in the Introit. The psalmist is not asking God merely to show him how to behave himself. He is saying, *“Show me the road on which I can find You coming to me. Let me, lift up my eyes, and see You coming down the path into my life.”*

And today’s Gospel gives us a snapshot picture of God answering this very prayer. If you want to see one graphic scene which symbolises what the Christian message has to say about God, then call up in your mind a vision of the event described in today’s Gospel.

Down a dusty road into the open gates of an eastern city, called Jerusalem, rides a drab-clothed Jewish teacher on an ordinary little grey donkey. If we could only see that odd, homely procession as it really was! We would have to blink and rub our eyes at the mere suggestion that the Figure in the center of the commotion is God.

And that is precisely the incredible point our Christian faith has to make: that God comes down the dusty road to men. Christianity tells of a God who is different from the gods of other religions. The god of the philosophers, for instance, sits in his heaven in unflustered majesty and waits quietly for men to struggle through the dust and grime, and climb the steep road to him.

But the God revealed to us in Christ does not sit and wait. He comes down to be one flesh with His people. He comes to live and struggle with His people through all the pain and trouble and temptation of our ordinary human lives. He comes to go even into death for His people. The death He dies is the death of the sinner, the death that turns His Father’s face from Him and leaves Him to taste the pangs of hell alone. This is God’s answer when we pray that He will show you His way and His path. He points to the cross. That is how He comes to cure your sin and to fill your need for Him.

And God never stops coming. The God who comes never stops coming to those who learn to wait for Him. Jesus Christ did not remain dead. He rose

from the grave and is very much alive today. When you pray, “*Show me Your ways, O LORD,*” He points you again and again to the path of the cross down which He comes to help you in the battle against sin and discouragement.

And this dusty path is made real and present for us in the message of the Gospel and the Sacrament of the Altar. When Advent stirs up our hearts to be people waiting for God, we must wait on that road. There Christ comes down to us to answer our need with nothing less than He Himself! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.