

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Advent 3
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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Some things are worth waiting for

⁶ There was a man, sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as an eyewitness to testify about the light so that everyone would believe through him. ⁸ He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.

¹⁹ This is the testimony John gave when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, “Who are you?”

²⁰ He confessed and did not deny. He confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

²¹ And they asked him, “Who are you then? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

“No,” he answered.

²² Then they asked him, “Who are you? Tell us so we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ just as Isaiah the prophet said.”

²⁴ They had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵ So they asked John, “Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet?”

²⁶ “I baptize with water,” John answered. “Among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.”

²⁸ These things happened in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

—John 1:6-8, 19-28

It’s one of the most offensive and vile four-letter words in the English language. It’s a word that can push people over the edge and send them into a rage. You hear it, and you bristle with irritation. Someone has the nerve to say it to you, and you might find yourself chafing with anger, frustration and resentment.

The word is “wait.”

I’m not talking about “Give me just a minute,” or “I’ll be right with you in a moment.” No, I mean “wait.” It means you can’t have what you want, you can’t do what you want, you can’t go where you want until something changes. Meanwhile you have to wait.

When I was a child, the hardest thing about the season leading up to Christmas was the wait. There were good things piling up under that Christmas tree—beautifully wrapped presents, and some of them had my name on them—but my brother and sister and I had to wait to open them.

The Jews of Jesus’ day knew what it meant to wait. They had been waiting for thousands of years for God to deliver on his promise. God had said to Adam and Eve right after they fell into sin and brought death and destruction on themselves and on all of God’s creation that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent who had deceived Eve. And Adam and Eve waited, but they turned to dust before they saw the fulfillment of the promise.

Two thousand years before John the Baptist came to baptize in the Jordan River God had promised Abraham, “In your offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” Abraham waited, but he died before he saw the fulfillment of the promise.

Kings ruled God’s people, prophets preached to God’s people. They promised the coming of the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Christ, who would make everything right. And the people waited. For thousands of years they waited, and generations were born, lived, watched, waited, and died in the faithful expectation that God would deliver on his promise in his own time. Now John the Baptist told the people they would have to wait only a little while more. “I am not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet,” said John the Baptist. “I am the voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” “Among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” The time was right for the Christ to appear. John the Baptist prepared the way. And soon the wait—the long, long wait—would be over.

Waiting can be a good thing. That doesn't mean I like it, but some things are worth waiting for. Waiting breeds patience. Waiting teaches sacrifice, dedication, resilience—important virtues in life. When you're waiting for something worthwhile, excitement builds, anticipation mounts. And when what you're waiting for is delivered, it's all the sweeter. What happens to people when they go through life thinking that all their expectations will be instantly met? You want it—you can have it. Instant gratification! Whatever it takes to make you happy, go for it! Indulge your every whim! If you can't afford it, charge it. If it feels good, do it. You end up with a very impatient, shallow, self-centered, narcissistic society that is poorly equipped to handle adversity. You end up with people living from momentary pleasure to momentary pleasure, going from one high to the next. You end up doing things that bring quick happiness and bring no lasting virtue or value. You end up with people who can't sit still for 30 seconds without pulling out our phones and checking them. We never experience anything deep or meaningful because we are caught up in the trivial of the now. Sadly, we live in an impatient society, and we ourselves are impatient individuals, who constantly have to resist the desire to scratch the latest itch or gratify the latest urge. Life becomes meaningless and empty, and we scramble to find something to fill it. We flit from one quest for happiness to another, from one emotional high to the next, but we never find anything deeper. We miss out on joy and true contentment. Until we learn to wait. Yes, learning to wait can be a good thing, and some things are worth waiting for.

So God tells us, "Wait. Learn to wait for something better." John the Baptist told the people, "Wait. Jesus is coming. It won't be long. Watch and wait." When Jesus comes he's not just coming to scratch some temporary itch. He's not coming to bring the next thrill, the next moment of excitement, the next snippet of temporary happiness. The King is coming to bring something deeper, more meaningful. He's coming to fill our hearts with joy—joy now and joy for all eternity.

But it's hard to wait for something better. I want heaven now. I want all my aches and pains and stresses and problems and frustrations and difficulties to go away *now*. Do you know what a PCA pump is? If you've been in the hospital or if you've ever visited someone in the hospital after a major surgery, like a knee replacement, you may be familiar with a PCA (patient-controlled analgesia) pump. The patient has a push button connected to a pump that dispenses medication, often morphine. When the pain level starts to rise, the patient pushes the button, and it dispenses a shot of morphine to bring the pain back under control. It's great! It's a huge blessing to ease the discomfort of the patient after surgery. It also pretty much means the end of the pastoral visit because within about 10 seconds the patient can be so euphoric that they won't even remember the pastor was there. A PCA pump is programmed to dispense only a certain dose of painkiller and only every so often. Morphine is highly addictive, so the dose is closely monitored and carefully metered.

If only we had a button to push whenever we experience pain in life! If only we could press a button and make marital strife and family problems go away. If only there were a button we could press that would within 10 seconds take away all the stress, the pressure, the uncertainty, the turmoil in our lives. If only we could push a happy button when someone we love leaves us in death. If only we could push a button and go from sad to happy just like that!

But we can't. Instead we have to wait for Jesus to deliver us from this valley of tears. Wait for him. Wait!

When Jesus came as the long-expected Christ to fulfill all the promises God made to his people, he didn't deliver what many people were looking for—a quick fix, earthly happiness. No, he delivered something deeper and more meaningful. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him, but to all who did receive him he gave the right to be called children of God. When Jesus came to you and called you to be his disciple, he did the same for you. He came to be your Savior from sin. He came to forgive you. He came to spill his blood for you and wash all your wickedness and all my rebellion away. He came to give you the joy of sins forgiven. That's not just a temporary high or a momentary feeling of happiness. It's a deep, solid conviction. It's the confident, joyful certainty that you are loved by God, that you are secure in his care, that he will give you what you need to weather the storms of life, and that he will take you to be with him in heaven. Jesus came to quiet your conscience with the peace of knowing that your eternal future with him is secure. Jesus came to wipe away your tears with the promise of a joyful reunion in heaven with your loved ones who have died in the faith. Jesus came, so that your life could have infinitely more meaning than what is defined by these few meaningless years on earth.

Jesus is coming. Wait for him. Wait! We welcome him soon at Christmas, a little baby, our infant King. Use this season of Advent to prepare in humility, repentance, sorrow over sin and eager expectation to greet our Savior. Wait! Set aside the daily distractions and all the hurry of the holidays and wait. Set your heart on your coming Savior, who is coming to rescue you for eternity. Put your cell phone down. Set aside your to-do list. Ponder. Reflect. Contemplate. Marvel. Be amazed. And be filled with joy that your Savior is coming for you.

What do you want to experience in life—fleeting happiness or lasting joy? On the roller coaster of life we have all experienced fleeting happiness, temporary euphoria when things are going well, the momentary highs in life. Unfortunately, between the happy peaks there are also the valleys of sadness, of pain, of loss. Sometimes the happy peaks are elusive and few and the dismal valleys are long and dark. Sometimes in this life happiness eludes us

altogether. Lasting joy is only found in Jesus. It's the deep confidence that nothing in this life can rob you of your Savior. It's the quiet certainty that as you go through the ups and downs of life, Jesus is with you, working out all things for your good. It's the quiet confidence that Jesus came once to rescue his people and he will come again to take his people home to heaven, where there will be no more ups and downs, no more tears, trials and tribulations, no more aches and pains, no more mourning or sorrow, no more death. Only joy. Endless, unmitigated, eternal joy with Jesus!

So wait! Because Jesus is worth waiting for. Amen.