

Advent I (RCL/A): "Advent I: Stay Busy or Get Busy!"
Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44
November 29-30, 2025
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

I'm hoping that there was someone at every Thanksgiving table on Thursday who led a blessing before everyone dove into the feast. When my parents were alive the family tradition was for the youngest grandchild at the table to say grace. Kristiane is the youngest cousin, so she's done her share of praying before meals! I tried to continue that tradition this Thursday, but got "the look," so I offered the blessing myself ☺.

Determining who will say the blessing can be like a game of hot potato. Unless it's a formal memorized prayer like "Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts," or "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest," **many** people are not confident in their ability to make up the prayer on the spot. There's a story about one family having a hard time finding a willing volunteer, so the mom "voluntold" her little boy Billy, encouraging him, "Just think of what Mommy says." A light bulb seemed to go off in his eyes; he proceeded to bow his head, fold his hands, and say, "Dear God, why did I invite all these people?" **'Last** time in a **long** time Billy was assigned to say grace!

Let me clarify that **I** was **not** thinking that on Thursday! I was grateful for everyone there, and could only have wished **more** of the family were with us. During my early morning walk on Friday morning, I was thinking of what a symphony of activity there was in the kitchen, of how I was pretty well organized, but **never** could have pulled it all off on my own. My sister was making the gravy, Kristiane was whipping the mashed potatoes, her husband was carving the turkey. It takes a village. In my experience Thanksgiving dinner is not the accomplishment of just one chef; it's a **community** work of art. A friend made the cranberry sauce, another friend tutored me in seasoning the turkey with fresh herbs, a guest provided the wine and the Swedish gravy whisk

made of twigs, my daughter made the holiday cocktails, my sister prepared the broccoli puff, Pastor Mark helped in the kitchen. We were all **waiting** for dinner, but busily **preparing** in the meantime. There's the bridge to our Gospel this first weekend of Advent: waiting involves preparation. **Faithful** waiting involves **important** preparations.

Matthew's description of 2 folks going about their everyday chores, 1 person being snatched away and the other left behind to wonder what just happened, sounds a lot like that bumper sticker that says, "Caution: if the rapture occurs, the driver of this car will disappear." But the people who know these things say this is no "rapture" reference. Matthew didn't know from "rapture." He simply reinforces Jesus' urgent warning that He won't be sending out a "Save the Date" before He comes again. So it's best to live each day as if this IS the day of His return.

We talked about this a couple weeks ago. It's fruitless and a waste of time to scan the sky **or** the news for the signs we heard about in St. Luke's Gospel that "the end is near." For us to "Keep awake...." (Matt. 24:42) and "be ready" (Matt. 24:44) is to be doing what the Lord commands: loving God with all our heart, mind and soul, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. This weekend's letter to the Romans speaks about "[throwing] off the works of darkness and [putting] on the armor of light... [walking] decently, as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness...." (Romans 13:12-14) We're not to numb ourselves out from the scary stuff in the world, from our own and others' pain, in self-destructive and other-destructive ways. We are to be full of faith, "confidently" placing ourselves, our families, our communities, schools, nation and world into God's hands. By God's grace, we are to walk through every door the Holy Spirit opens for us, fulfilling God's call to be a faith-filled, courageous, loving and saving presence in this world.

Advent literally means "coming," and it refers to Jesus' coming in past, present and future. During Advent, we prepare to celebrate our Lord's birth in Bethlehem in the **past**. We also

faithfully wait for His promised coming again, at some time in the **future**. And we acknowledge His Presence among us, recognizing and serving Him **today**.

In my first call parish in Illinois we took the confirmands to a local synagogue to learn about Judaism and see Jewish worship space. The rabbi was very welcoming, spoke to the kids, and invited them to ask questions. One of the boys raised his hand and asked, with enough incredulity in his voice that I winced, "Is it true you're **still waiting** for the Messiah??" The rabbi said, "No," and I thought, "This is interesting!" Then he continued, "We're not just waiting, we're **preparing**." There's the beautiful Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*, the *healing of the world*. It's an acknowledgement that the Creator made the world perfect and we've managed to mess it up, so now we have a God-given responsibility to mend what is broken. I think of a stained glass window I saw in a church in England (maybe St. Martin in the Fields?). The window had been shattered during the World War II blitz, and a new window fashioned from the broken bits. It was obviously different than the original, an abstract design, but still quite beautiful.... By God's grace we are to pick up and care for the shards of creation. God chooses to use us to make what is broken whole again. That's what **faithful waiting** looks like for us.

In order to wait faithfully, to channel divine healing, we need **grace**, power from on high. The "means of grace," the rivers through which God's love and power flow, are Word and Sacrament: the Word of God (Scripture), and the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Jesus is at the heart of it all, so that's the paradox of the command, "Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." (Matt. 24:42) In many, very important ways, he's already here! He is vitally, powerfully present in all the means of grace:

- Jesus Christ is the Living **Word of God**, as St. John says in the prelude of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) Martin Luther called the Bible "the manger that holds the Christ Child." We don't worship

the book; we worship the One whom the book reveals. When we turn to Scripture, dwell in Scripture, study and meditate on Scripture, we are keeping company with Christ.

- In **Holy Baptism** we die to sin and rise to new life in Christ, not just on the **day** of our Baptism, but potentially every day thereafter. We are “marked with the cross of Christ forever.” We belong no longer to ourselves but to Him.
- In **Holy Communion** the crucified and risen Lord gives us His Body & Blood, in, with and under the consecrated bread and wine, the blessed elements of the Holy Meal. The night before He died, our Lord Jesus commanded, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” He is not the absent Founder of this meal. He is the present Host. If you ever find yourself asking, “Where is God??” look no further than the font, the altar, the Scriptures.

Plus, there is our Lord’s laser-like teaching that He is also **very** much present in those who suffer among us: the last, the lost, the least. “I was hungry and you fed Me, I was naked and You clothed me, I was sick and you cared for Me, I was in prison and you visited Me... Whenever you did it to one of the least of these, who are members of My family, you did it to Me.”

We who are members of the Body of Christ don’t “faithfully wait,” passionately prepare for our Lord’s second coming as a gaggle of Lone Rangers. We do so **together**, praying and serving as a “beloved community,” as Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to the Church in his lovely reflection, *Life Together*. The joy of Thanksgiving is recognizing God as the Source of all our blessings, celebrating the occasion with others, and sitting down to a feast that is a group effort. So is ministry a group effort. We may offer financial gifts, perform loving labors, spark holy creativity, lavish encouragement or faithfully raise up prayers, but it takes every one of us to do the Lord’s work until He comes again. The next bit of Matthew’s Gospel after today’s is about a faithful and an unfaithful servant. The take-away is: “Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.” (Matt. 24:46) Whether He comes to us or we go to Him first, let’s get busy or stay busy! Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

