

Gather others into the family of hope

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Advent Sunday – Year C – Jer 33 14-16, Ps 25 1-10, 1 Th 3 9-13, Lk 21 25-38

How do you like it when you're kept waiting unexpectedly? If you've made a time to meet someone and they don't turn up, do you feel inconvenienced? Or do you worry if they're okay? Or do you wonder if you wrote down the wrong day in your diary? For most of us, how we feel about waiting is what we make of it. We can get annoyed; we can seize the opportunity to get something done; or we can just close our eyes and stop being busy for once. What do we do with our waiting time is our choice. And usually, the delay is seldom a really serious problem for us?

But for many millions of people around the world, waiting is many orders of magnitude more serious than it is for us. In a war zone or where people are suffering from a famine, waiting on decisions made by complete strangers is a daily burden that plagues people's every waking minute. In the Sudan and in Gaza, right now, both violence and famine are a constant, brutal reality being deliberately inflicted on millions of innocent families – all of them waiting for help, waiting desperately for peace, waiting for someone to rescue them.

And closer to home, Pacific Islanders attended the recent COP29 UN climate conference to tell again their stories of disappearing homes and salt-poisoned crops, only to be drowned out by the hundreds of agents and lobbyists representing fossil fuel industries from countries like ours. Our Island neighbours cry out – *How long must we wait? God, who will do something about this?* Our own waiting is trivial compared with

these good people's waiting for an end to such shameless injustices.

Advent waiting is about their sort of waiting – the waiting that cries out for an end to tragedy born of greed – greed for money, greed for power – and perpetuated by the determination to keep that money and power, regardless of how it's been gained, and regardless of the suffering it causes. Advent is about the kind of waiting that is open-eyed to this sin that poisons the world. And yet at the same time, Advent is about a kind of waiting that's filled with the most extraordinary hope. We heard that in Jeremiah's words of hope to the exiles in Babylon this morning.

Jeremiah promises exiled slaves a righteous king of their own, one who will govern them with justice back in their own home – the dearest wish of every one of them. But when? For now, the suffering continues. But there's hope. It's something that's profoundly true for people of faith. It may sound tenuous, but it really makes a huge difference. The difference seems to me that with hope, you can start getting ready.

Today's Gospel speaks like this too. Nature will violently mark the coming of the Son of Man. And we are provoking Nature to do just that now; just ask our Islander neighbours. But even so, in the Gospel, we hear the voice of hope too.

Advent has its roots in the experience of the very earliest Christians. After Christ's resurrection and ascension, they waited and prepared for Jesus's second coming. They believed he'd come again in their own lifetime, and at his coming again, all the ills of the world would be cured. 2,000 years later, we tend to respond to the delay in Christ's return by redirecting our focus. Rather than looking for the healing to come at the end of time, we tend to focus on our own personal end; our death.

So what *are* we called to do? Roll up our sleeves and get

ready, or sit and wait on God? Both actually. We need time to listen, to hear; to wait. And we also need time to get ready. Advent *is* that time, and we must protect it, so we're not repeatedly ambushed by immediate, insistent calls on our attention. Silence and listening for God are two rare commodities in the type of world we live in today. But the Church isn't called just to sit and wait. We're called urgently to gather others into the family of hope. Jesus said to do that. If our hope is of such significance, then it's vital that we share it with others who don't know that hope.

As we wait this Advent for the coming of the Christ child, we're also waiting for his coming again at the end of time. We're waiting in hope in a world starved of hope; facing apocalypse. We're called to share that hope urgently. God calls us to help people get ready with us. We are called to gather others into this family of hope; hope for eternal life; hope for a renewed creation; hope for justice, hope for peace, hope for plenty. So what are we waiting for? What are you waiting for? Amen