

**“May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you” words from our second reading, the 1st letter to the Thessalonians, the 3rd chapter, the 12th verse. May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Advent is a season of waiting. In Advent, we wait to celebrate Christ’s first coming at Christmas - God’s birth as one of us in Jesus Christ. In Advent, we also wait for Christ’s second coming in glory at the end of time. We prepare ourselves to meet him when he comes ago. Between these two comings we find ourselves waiting.

Even though Advent is the season of waiting, I remember as a child the longest ‘wait’ of Advent wasn’t in Advent at all. The longest wait wasn’t the night before Christmas. It wasn’t the wait for my Dad to wake up so my brother and I could open our stockings. It wasn’t even the wait for those relatives who we knew would bring the best presents - usually Nan and Grandad - who always arrived frustratingly late and suspiciously merry on Christmas Day.

The longest ‘wait’ of Advent was the wait for Advent to begin. Each year, at the end of November, the Advent calendars arriving on the mantelpiece taunted us as we waited excitedly Advent to begin. The wait to be allowed a church-sanctioned piece of chocolate each day after breakfast seemed to last for ever!

Just as the beginning of Advent marked the end of waiting to open that first cardboard door and being able to hurriedly consume that frankly disappointing square of chocolate, the start of Advent for us here at St Peter’s also marks the end of a time of waiting. Last Sunday marked the end of my waiting to be with you all and the end of your waiting for your next Vicar to arrive. The Archdeacon made sure no one could say they hadn’t heard that the wait was over!

Just as one period of waiting ends, Advent - our season of waiting - begins.

Our first reading from the prophecy of Jeremiah reminds us just how long the people of God have been waiting. 'The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah'. The waiting of the people of God goes back many life times. With Christ's birth 'the hopes and fears of all the years', as the carol O Little Town of Bethlehem has it, find their end.

The prophet Jeremiah reassures God's people that their waiting will not be endless. 'In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land'. Their waiting shall come to an end with the birth of Christ, the one who brings true justice. Christ's birth means that all those who wait for justice are promised that one day their longing will be fulfilled.

Meanwhile, we are called upon to wait. Our New Testament readings guide us in how we are to wait. Our Gospel reading reminds us to be attentive as we wait. We are called to be alert, to observe the signs of the times. To see the world as it really is, to pay attention to God's work in our lives and in the life of our community and church family.

In our reading from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul also guides us as we wait. He prays that God might strengthen our hearts in holiness so that when our wait is over we may be found blameless. He prays that the Lord may increase the love we have for each other and for every person no matter who they are as we continue to wait.

This morning reminds us that the Christian life is a life of waiting. The arrival of a new Vicar or reaching the last day of Advent does not end our waiting. To be Christian is to wait.

To wait for Christ, to wait upon God and each other. As the poet T. S. Eliot wrote: 'the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting'.

Our waiting is not a time of empty expectancy, like waiting for a bus or train. Our waiting is a time for attentive preparation, alert to the needs of our community and full of love for God and all of those around us.

This morning challenges us to ask how are we going to make use of this season of waiting? In what ways are we going to grow in love of God and of each other in the days and weeks ahead?

As we wait for Christ to come into our midst in the Eucharist we are about to celebrate, let us prepare ourselves to feed on him and be strengthened in our waiting. Strengthened and sent out from this place to wait on God and each other, and to grow in love of God, our selves and each other until that day on which we shall see Christ face to face.