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Nov 30, 2014 Hurry Up!...and Wait  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent

Hurry up...and Wait

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, beginning of the year in the Christian calendar ... our New Year's Day so to speak! It's the time when we prepare and look, once again, for the second coming of Christ into the world. And, as the God is Still Speaking Advent devotional reads, "the gospel speaks the same challenging words of comfort to you as it did to those early Christians: keep awake, be ready, live like you know that a new world could be born any minute. Are you listening? All creation groans with labor pangs."

Advent is a time of waiting and hoping. In this hustle, bustle world it can seem like we're being told, "hurry up and wait." Life quickens and preparations can sometimes get to be a little crazy like when you prepare for a loved one to return from a long trip.

You hurry, hurry, hurry to make everything perfect and then sit and wait and wait and wait. As the expected time nears, your heart beats a little quicker and all your senses are alert for any sign of their arrival: the phone ringing, news on the TV of a traffic jam or flight delay, headlights flashing by your window, tires crunching on your gravel driveway, the muffled thud of the car door. And then finally the front door flings open and hope bursts in. You embrace, in joy and in relief that you are safely together in each others arms. Will it be like that when Christ arrives once again?

**Advent, a time of waiting and hoping for Christ's  
return...**

In the passage we read today, I don't get a sense of excited anticipation mixed with a little bit of fear. No, for me the overwhelming feeling is a sense of foreboding. In each of the eight translations I checked, the message is the same: Be alert! Be ready! Be watchful! Keep a sharp lookout! Be on guard! These are some sharp commands... warnings even! Be prepared! Be on the alert! Each Bible translates the Greek slightly different, but each

maintains the same sense of agitated watchfulness. I don't like it.

It makes me feel like pacing back and forth, like a caged tiger looking for way to escape. It sounds like something bad is about to happen and I'll have to do something – but what?!

Even the way the passage opens gives us the picture of something wrong... “In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” But, shouldn't we be excited? After all, we are also given the brilliant image of, “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” You can almost hear the trumpets playing in the background, heralding the arrival of our Savior!

And then, “Christ will send the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”

Another glorious vision of thousands of ethereal, winged beauties, black, white, Asian, all colors, shapes and sizes, swooping down

upon us and in all directions all around the earth to gather up those who believe, those who practice a “love your God and neighbor” type of faith. In other words, everyone who has lived a loving life will be saved from the terrible destruction which signals not only the end of the earth as we know it but with it, the second coming of Christ.

### **Advent, a time of waiting and hoping for Christ’s return**

When Christ comes again, we like to think we will all be saved from our troubles and from the troubles of the earth. Sounds good right about now with financial and economic downturns, with pollution, carbon and otherwise, increasing as we speak, with shelters and food banks overflowing with new faces, some who used to be the givers now coming in need of assistance themselves.... With racism and sexism and a government that just can’t get out of its own way in order to serve the people. Couldn’t

someone come in and save us right now from all this pain and anguish?

But, no one seems to be coming to save us. This second coming of Christ hasn't happened in 2000 plus years...maybe they were wrong, those men who wrote the bible. Or, maybe we're wrong for believing. Or maybe, just maybe, we need to use a different lens ... to turn things around and look at it another way. Maybe Christ won't come again. Maybe Christ doesn't have to come again, because maybe he never left us in the first place.

Consider the parable of the fig tree. Jesus indicates that just as surely as you know summer is about to come when the fig tree starts to sprout, you will know Christ will be coming when these events (the darkening of the sun and moon, earthquakes, etc.) begin to happen. Jesus promises that His words will last even after heaven and earth have passed away....even after our lives have turned upside down. It is no wonder we have become complacent,

not watching with the alertness commanded of us. We have seen so many wars, so many eclipses of the sun and moon, so many falling stars, and we are still here.... trouble is still here...innocents are still being shot, loved ones still die and leave us. And yet we go on!

**Maybe Christ has never left us.**

Today, the first Sunday of Advent, is about being prepared for the coming of Christ into our lives – new life considered through the lens of the baby Jesus. But, what are we really waiting and hoping and preparing for with advent? Is the second coming of Christ an individual, a one time forever event, an experience??? ...or what... what is it?

Maybe, the second coming of Christ means a shift in our hearts... a shift that will deliver forth a changed world –

**A world ruled by love and compassion instead of fear and hate.**

Maybe the second coming of Christ occurs inside us instead of external to us. When we can act in accordance with that internal change, then we get to see and feel the baby kicking and screaming, gurgling and cooing.... Then we get to experience new life!

Jesus is asking us in this passage to be fiercely faithful, **to not play it safe anymore**. The second coming happens when we risk allowing Jesus Christ to live through us. Each day, with the help of God, we can strive to live the faithful and loving life Jesus demonstrated for us.

I have suggested that Christ never left us. So, perhaps the second coming of Christ is NOT Christ coming to US but rather us turning back to Christ. And, these special times of the year, like Advent, and special communities, like our community here at First Congregational Church of Montague (as in so many other spiritual

communities or churches) help us remember how to express the love we were so richly and abundantly born with.

This year, as we hear the stories once again of the virgin Mary giving birth to the light and the life that saves us all. As we walk to the stable in Bethlehem with Joseph and the wise men. As we witness with the shepherds and the animals this gift given to the world. Let us listen with all our senses alert and aware. Let us listen in our heart for how we can birth Christ into the world.

Listen...are you being called to do something new... stepping out in virgin territory to bring light to the world? Or are you the one to provide support to the person(s) or structures so that light could shine. Or perhaps it's the role of the shepherd that catches your attention...to guard and guide so light can shine.

Listen and inquire, in your prayers, in your time of meditation or in your advent devotional time, for how you might shine forth Christ

in the world. If we each could do that each day, wouldn't we have become that which we've been waiting for? Could Christmas happen any other way?

Amen and Amen.