



Sunday November 27, 2022  
Matthew 24:36-44

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompanado

As a child, one of the things I looked forward to most this time of year was our family's Advent calendar. But I'm not talking about the beautifully hand crafted wooden one my grandfather made with the intricate nativity characters, or even the one that was an elaborate tabletop Christmas village with individually dated drawers to hold the handmade pieces that made up the beautiful Christmas scene.

No, what I'm talking about is something far more important and memorable than either of those. See, every year my parents gifted us a new Advent calendar with a beautiful Christmas scene on the front that disguised a bunch of perforated and numbered little cardboard doors. And for each day of Advent we would get to open one of those precious little doors revealing behind it the delicious little, sculpted piece of chocolate it had been hiding!

Looking back now I realize that they may not have been the *highest* quality chocolates, but to my adolescent and naïve palate this was like a little piece of heaven. And yet, as delicious as those little morsels of chocolate were, more importantly, with each opened door, I knew that Christmas was just a little bit closer. Our Advent calendar was the way we counted down the days – how we waited – how we prepared for the celebration of Christmas that was soon to come.

However, the waiting wasn't easy, especially when I was really young and there were siblings to sharing the chocolate – I mean, the calendar with. Believe me, there was nothing in my 5, or 8, or even 10-year-old brain that could grasp the larger picture or be happy for one of my siblings when it was their turn. This is precisely why I told my wife that *our* kids would never have to go through that kind of suffering – and each of them would be getting their own Advent calendar.

I've always liked Advent. It was a time of expectation, anticipation, and excitement. From the beautiful decorations, to the music my parents played, and one couldn't forget the bowls of snacks set out for guests. Sure, it meant Jesus would soon be born in Bethlehem, but it also meant grandparents, presents, and Santa Clause. I looked forward to what was coming – one chocolatey day at a time.

But then something happened. Somewhere along the way life got really real and Advent changed. Advent was no longer just the seasonal countdown to Christmas – instead, it began to describe the reality of my life and world. Advent continued to be a season of waiting but was now filled with uncertainty, and definitely not the sweet kind I looked forward to in our chocolate Advent calendar. Instead, Advent had become a season of change – of letting go and looking to a future that was neither clear nor known.

*"But about that day and hour no one knows,"* Jesus says.

I hear those words and can't help but remember days and hours about which I did not and could not know:

1. The day and hour I met my wife for the first time
2. The day and hour one of my best friends called to say his wife had a series of debilitating strokes.
3. The day and hour I was first blessed to claim the title – Dad.
4. The day and hour I knelt in our Memorial Gardens and was ordained a pastor.
5. The day and hour not one but two beloved students would die.
6. The day and hour I stood over my mother's casket and spoke tear-soaked words commending her back to God.

The day and hour about which we do not know comes to us in a thousand different ways. It comes to us as an unexpected gift, an unwanted loss, an unimagined future, or maybe even a dream come true. Nevertheless, we had no way of knowing when, how, or if it would come. And we had no way of knowing what it would bring. Despite our best efforts to plan and prepare for the future, we live in the midst of uncertainty and unknowing. There are days and hours that take us completely by surprise, in good ways – and in not so good ways.

And now that I've told you some of mine, it makes me wonder about some of yours. I wonder about the day and hour about which you did not and could not know. What was the day and hour that took *you* by surprise



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and caught you off guard? What happened on that day and in that hour that you never expected, wanted, or could have imagined?

The day and hour of uncertainty and not knowing are what Advent is about. Advent is about our waiting in this uncertain time. And in many ways it describes our life. Advent offers us a lens through which we can see and reflect on our lives as we wait and prepare to step into an uncertain future.

And Advent, whether in the Church or in life, always begins with the day and hour about which we do not know. Nobody knows when, where, or how that day and hour will come. It's unforeseeable and unpredictable. It comes, Jesus says, like a thief in the night or a sweeping away flood.

And every year the gospel for the first Sunday in Advent sounds ominous and threatening. We call texts like today's apocalyptic, and we tend to hear them as end of the world texts. That's often how it feels when life is uncertain, the future is unpredictable, and we wait powerless for what comes next. It can feel like the world is ending.

The challenge of Advent then – of that day and hour about which you do not know, is to learn to live with not knowing, to stand in the mystery, to keep the questions and possibilities open, to embrace ambiguity, to not be too quick to resolve or shut down doubt – and to do all this without running away and trying to escape, without grasping for facts and reason, without blaming others and justifying ourselves.

I think that's what Jesus is getting at when he says we are to "keep awake" and to "be ready." *Keep awake and be ready for what?* I wish I could tell you, but I can't.

Some of you may be thinking: "*But I've waited in this uncertainty long enough for God to act, and I don't see anything good coming out of all this waiting!*" Some of you are waiting to see if chemotherapy or radiation will work. Some of you are waiting to see if your relationship will change for the better. Some of you are waiting on news which will dramatically impact your future. Some of you are waiting on job or college applications. Some of you are waiting for your prayers to be answered — at least to be answered in the way we think God should answer them.

Truth is – all this waiting is difficult. But what's absolutely certain is that even in the waiting, God is constantly present and at work in our lives. Today we begin Advent and the season of waiting. But unlike our typical waiting, Jesus reminds us that there's an expectation in our waiting.

Advent *is* a time of waiting...but not just waiting aimlessly. It's waiting expectantly, waiting for a promise to be fulfilled, waiting for something beyond our dreams or imagination, waiting for the unexpected that will completely surprise us. It's a waiting for what God will do, and he makes what he is doing visible among us in the unexpected miracle of a child's birth, in the unfathomable shadow of a cross, and in boundless gifts of water, bread and wine.

Despite the immature assumptions of my younger self, Advent isn't merely a season where we hang out for a while until Christmas happens. Advent is a season where we learn once again to be expectant people, people who anticipate, people who painstakingly look for the invasion of Christmas everywhere.

My friends, Advent reminds us how important it is to wait patiently for God, and to wait even through uncertainty. Most importantly though, Advent also points us beyond the waiting to receiving the fulfillment of God's promise in the birth of Jesus and experiencing the true wonder of God's blessing. Emmanuel – the fulfillment of a promise that God will always be both with us and for us.

One of my favorite prayers might help anchor us in this promise of presence and blessing – the one thing that is sure and certain amid all the uncertainties of this life. *Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*