

ANTICIPATION

Mark 13:33-37

I remember when they did the ketchup commercials using the background music of Carly Simon singing “Anticipation.” You’d see all kinds of people, young and old alike, waiting expectantly as the ketchup seemed to take forever to get out of the bottle. “Anticipation” is certainly something on peoples’ minds now that Thanksgiving is over. Nothing now “stands in the way” of our expectations of Christmas—company from out of town or a visit to grandparents, weeks off from school, the presents under the tree, and maybe even a good bonus from work. There are always those thoughts of anticipating the so-called “perfect” Christmas. Anticipation!

But do we want to anticipate? I’ve noticed that in recent commercials for the ketchup there is no more “anticipation.” The ketchup is in plastic squeeze bottles so that even the most thick, rich ketchup can be squirted out right away—no waiting!

“No waiting.” We seem to love that in our world. Think of how often people get new computers or upgrade their old ones so they don’t have to spend a few extra seconds waiting for something to show up on their screen. Ames is great because you might have to wait at the most ten minutes for normal daily traffic unlike the gridlock people have to face in cities like Chicago or D.C. Even if we have to wait in traffic, we have good stereo systems in our cars or we can whip out the cell phone and not let those minutes seem wasted. I notice how many students use cell phones to fill in the minutes it takes to walk between classes. If we have to wait, then at least we look for ways to fill in the time, anything to not be wasting time. “Anticipation” is replaced by busywork.

Jesus talks in our Gospel lesson to His disciples during Holy Week, just days before He was to die. As He anticipated His own death, He prepared His disciples to anticipate the end of the world.

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: “Watch!”

In track, athletes are taught to get into a special position before they begin a sprint. The same is true for football players to begin a play in a set position. Swimmers get into a crouch as the race starts. Baseball players are taught to get low and balance on their toes, ready to go either direction for the ball. Jesus seems to be putting us on our toes, getting us to anticipate when he comes again.

Getting into a set position certainly helps one to be ready for a race. It can be the difference between winning and losing. But you can only hold that position for so long. Muscles will tighten up and you need to relax if the start of the race is delayed.

So it is with anticipating Christ. People in the New Testament who lived when Jesus was alive anticipated Jesus returning in their lifetime. Paul says in our epistle lesson, “Therefore you do not lack anything as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” In Romans 13 Paul said, “The hour has come for you to wake from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” Peter says, “The end of all things is near.” But this is 2,000 years later. Can we be expected to wait especially when there is so much in our daily lives that needs to be done?

Our American dream is to be able to get to a comfortable standard of living so that we can relax, settle down, and be ready for retirement. But do we find ourselves “retiring” from God? It’s one thing to go to church when the kids are in Sunday School and when we want our youth to be involved with peers at church. But we get busy with other things, or we just want to relax. Maybe it would be different if we knew for sure that Jesus was coming in a few weeks. But do we have the luxury of anticipating Him all the time?

I remember in college coming home for a weekend without warning my parents. I wanted to surprise them. They were glad I came, but my mother insisted that the next time I tell her ahead of time. It wasn’t that she wanted the warning so she could get things ready, but she said, “I missed all the joy of anticipating your coming.”

Think of the joy we can have anticipating Christmas—not the crazy rush to make our homes like Martha Stewart’s or the pressure of getting the right gifts, but the joy of looking forward to seeing relatives, the anticipation of some quiet time, or the fun of doing things together as a family. Jesus warns us in our text to fill us with joyful anticipation, to give us a boost, to get us energized for His coming.

Jesus talks in our text about the man who leaves his servants in charge of his place. Picture young people whose parents have left them in charge on their own while dad and mom are gone. If they mess up the place, they won’t look forward to their parents coming back. They would rather go on with their business, messing things up. But if they decide while their parents are away to fix things up, then they are anxious for the day their parents are back, wanting to show them what they did. They are like the child who can’t wait to get home and show mom and dad what he drew for them in school.

That is the way we can watch for Jesus, because we can’t wait to show Him what we are doing. As a congregation we support our friend Kebede and his family as missionaries in Ethiopia. We can’t wait to show Jesus what we are doing in that mission. We can’t wait to show Him what we are doing to share His love with our families—helping aging parents, taking time to listen to our children, letting a husband or wife know how important they are to us. We

can't wait to show Him how we want people to share the faith we have, people from all over the world, people in our own community. People hurting after a divorce, students who so easily get distracted from God, and many people in this community who are searching for the answers we can only find in Christ Jesus.

We prepare to celebrate Christmas. As we do that we anticipate Jesus' coming again. He won't "plop" out of the bottle we squeeze. We can't control Him; we can't control history like that. Only God can. Thank God that only God can because otherwise we would be in deep trouble. But we can anticipate His coming which, because He came on Christmas, we know is a question not of "if," but "when." He's coming!