

Ready or Not . . .
December 1, 2013
Matthew 24:36-44

Our Scripture reading focuses on Jesus' coming again. Listen closely for God's wisdom for us this day from the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew.

But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

May God bless the reading and hearing of these words.

Let us pray . . . Holy One, help us to move beyond the season of shopping into a season of preparing. Take and use my words to empower our imaginations, awaken us to new possibilities, and embolden us in our actions. Amen.

I am good at many things, but waiting isn't one of them. Once I determine I want something, I work to achieve it. Simply waiting and allowing things to happen in good time seems unthinkable.

Perhaps this is why I graduated from high school at the age of 16. It may well be why I purchased my first house while still a teenager.

And, I suspect it played a role getting married to Susan less than a year after we first met.

Could it be that my life would make an excellent case study in how not to wait?

I look at Black Friday shopping as an activity that should require a warning label: excessive waiting required. While my wife has gone shopping on Black Friday on numerous occasions, I have not. I find that I simply must abstain from this inefficient exercise in procuring inexpensive items.

By now you are learning that my lack of skill in waiting isn't limited to any one area of life or one time of year.

From landline to beeper to cell phone to smart phone, I have always been an early adopter of new communication devices. I expect that latest model will speed up rather than slow down all I do. All I want from my smart phone is an easier and better life.

If you took my smart phone away from me, I would be lost. Not only would I be without a GPS to get me where I need to go, I would lack the calendar information to know where it is I am supposed to go and the contact information to call anyone to find out what I was missing.

My love for and early adoption of technology has caused some to label me a technology evangelist. I enjoy what I use so much; I can't help but share my knowledge with others. I have even turned this passion into a position. One of many roles I have in life right now is learning about new educational technology, then introducing it to professors.

Maybe you think I live my life in overdrive. Perhaps your advice to me would be to slow down and to enjoy a different pace of life – even to welcome opportunities to wait.

Earlier this year, a colleague suggested I add a new book to my reading list. While I typically invite such suggestions, the title made it clear this was outside of my normal reading: *Making Habits, Breaking Habits*. The subtitle, however, was enough to convince me to read it: "Why We Do Things, Why We Don't, and How to Make Any Change Stick."¹

¹ Jeremy Dean. *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: Why We Do Things, Why We Don't, and How to Make Any Change Stick* (Da Capo Press, 2013).

Jeremy Dean, the author of this book, never once mentions Advent. He does, however, offer guidance that is helpful as we enter this season of waiting. For example:

There is a story of a young comedian approaching Seinfeld at the height of his success on the comedy circuit to ask for advice on how to improve. Seinfeld's responded by sharing the secret of becoming a better comedian: write better jokes. The only way to write better jokes is to practice. And the only way to practice well is to practice consistently by creating a writing habit.

To get started Seinfeld recommended the young comedian purchase a big wall calendar containing a box for every day of the year. Seinfeld told him, "At the conclusion of every day you achieve your writing task, place a big cross on the calendar."

"As the weeks pass, the chain of crosses on the calendar grows longer and longer. Your only job, urged Seinfeld, was not to break the chain."²

What about Advent habits?

Have you ever used an Advent calendar? Aren't they a daily lesson on waiting that we can touch and see – a lesson just as powerful for adults as for children? Don't they offer an ever-present visual reminder of your progress as the days pass?

Have you ever read an Advent devotional? Aren't they a daily lesson on waiting that we can read and process? Don't they offer data that fuels introspection, and encourages transformation?

What about Advent worship? Isn't it a weekly reminder that together as a community of faith we are waiting? Doesn't it flood all of our senses with stimuli to orient and reorient us to continue our preparations?

Whether you are seeking to learn the art of waiting and preparing at Advent or seeking to adopt a healthy habit of some other sort, Jeremy Dean suggests:

² Ibid., p.131

“Making healthy habits should be a voyage of discovery. It’s both about discovering exactly what you are already doing, then working out what sorts of modest changes are practical.”³

Radical changes are hard. They are also rarely habit forming.

Don’t set unrealistic expectations for yourself this Advent.

Do plan to embrace the season.

Do plan to embrace an achievable habit as a part of your waiting.

Think back to your childhood. Did you ever play hide and seek? Maybe the rules were the same each time you played. The one who was chosen to be “it” marched to an assigned spot, counted to 100, then shouted, “ready or not, here I come.” Everyone else had lots of time to find a hiding spot and then wait for the next round of the game to start.

I think Advent is a lot like hide and seek. Advent isn’t a game, but a season. We don’t run and hide while a youngster counts quickly to 100; we prepare as the days on the calendar count up to 25. In both the game and the season, we don’t need every second to get where we are going – to get ready. We always have time left over – time to wait.

Today is the first day of a new church year. As we begin preparing our hearts and our lives for the One who is to come, we do so knowing that before long we will hear a shout like no other: “ready or not, here he comes.” Amen.

³ Ibid., p.189.