

Devotions – November 27 – December 3, 2016

By Pastor Kris Ertl
Retired Pastor, Rapid River, MI

Sunday, November 27, 2016

Text: John 3:16-17

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

As a pre-Advent exercise, I decided to list the ways I am good at waiting. This is what I learned....waiting in line at the grocery store...not good at this at all. Waiting for my computer to be repaired while I sit at the counter with the rest of the "gray-haired" people...not good at this. Waiting for my husband to say his final goodbyes to friends...not good at this. I'm more of a wave and out the door kind of person. Waiting for my kids to call...not good at this. So, honestly? I can't think of a single waiting that I am good at. In order to wait I have to prepare myself. I have to have a book to read in the doctor's office, or the hospital waiting room, or the coffee shop. I have to plan out my menu for when the kids come for the holidays or friends stop over. I have to make sure my car has gas in it and my bags are packed to travel north. There is preparation that needs to take place in order to wait...at least for me. Perhaps that is what God is asking of us now as we move into Advent...prepare to wait...actively pray, work, pack, decorate, cook, write cards, visit, feed, engage. God is preparing to do an amazing thing, Ruth Duck says, in her book *Flames of the Spirit*. Now is the Advent of the long-awaited Messiah, our bringer of hope, our Prince of Peace, our leader of love. So we wait...thanks be to God!!

Let us pray: *Lord, we give you thanks for the possibility of waiting. May we actively wait for Jesus' coming. Amen.*



Monday, November 28, 2016

Text: Isaiah 41:17

"When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

We all gathered at the auto to begin our trip to visit the development sites of Lutheran World Federation in Zimbabwe, East Africa. There were eight of us or so and we were going to visit a dam site. Lutheran Federation had funded the purchase of tools for this particular dam site and we were going to visit and see the progress they were making. As we arrived at the village after a very dusty ride, we saw that the women of the village were meeting with the village elder to pray and prepare for their work day. We were invited to join them in prayer and then we joined them as well in dancing our way to the site of the building of the dam. It hadn't rained for eleven

years, the drought was severe, cattle were dying in the fields of starvation, women had to walk many miles to get a jug of water for cooking and drinking for their families. So, the dam! There was much excitement as the women gathered around to get the two pick axes, five shovels and the squares of cloth that they were using to build the dam. Yes, that is what they used. They would stick twigs and dried grasses in the cracks of big boulders, light them on fire, and when they exploded, they carried away the smaller rocks in the squares of cloth. Day after day, year after year they prayed for God to send rain and then they would go out and continue to build the dam.

Let us pray: *Lord, you answered the prayers of the people of Zimbabwe and sent rain. It was a long time but they continued to trust that you would answer their prayers. May we too trust that our prayers will be answered as we wait. Amen.*



Tuesday, November 29, 2016

Text: Micah 7:7

"But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

My first call was to a "dying" church on the fringes of the heart of the city. They had no money, they had few people and their building was in need of repair. None of the call committee nor the clergy group of the inner city congregations spoke the "d" word. There was an upbeat understanding of hope and possibility and commitment to community knowing that God would provide all that was necessary to be about ministry in that place. We, over the seven plus years I served there, were so blessed. Our involvement in community grew, particularly our mission and ministry with the elementary school in the neighborhood. Our membership grew and our finances looked a little better. We proclaimed the gospel in Word and Deed. Tough times hit. Membership went down, community involvement changed, people who had been members for a long time died or moved into nursing homes. There was a move to merge congregations...a new way of thinking. The process was painful...what does God want for us to do...always asking the question of mission. The merger took place and then there was a financial problem. Money that had been gifted to the church had been embezzled. O Lord, how long? Leaders asked...should we just fold up and scatter? Should we sell the building and go our separate ways? The community said..."No, we need you here!" So the decision was made to stay and to continue to do God's work. Today the congregation is working with the Moravian Church, ministering to God's people in the neighborhood, making ends meet, building links with churches outside the neighborhood, providing a brick oven for those who want to bake bread...and it continues!!

Let us pray: *God, you heard the cries of your people and you answered. We give you thanks for blessing congregations as they minister to your people in the way they have been gifted. As we wait for Jesus to come again, continue, we pray, to fill us with your love, your hope and courage to do your will. Amen.*



Wednesday, November 30, 2016

Text: Isaiah 35:5-6

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

On the corner of a busy intersection of our small community there is a stop light. It's a "T" stop so it can be challenging for pedestrians to get across the street. The stop light has buttons to push which then announces, in a very authoritarian voice, "WAIT," "WAIT," "WAIT." So we stand and wait. If one is unfamiliar with the button system, you could be standing there for quite some time! When the lights change, the voice then announces, "The walk sign is on crossing..." whatever street it is. It seemed a bit much to me so I asked a city worker why the voice commands on the lights and he told me it was for those who were visually impaired. Those folks who couldn't see the lights or the traffic would be helped by the voice commands. "Wait" was a life-saving command. We who often are blind have been commanded to wait as well. We wait for Jesus to come again. We wait impatiently, passively or not, but we wait.

Let us pray: *Lord, open our eyes and unstop our ears that we may sing for joy! Amen*



Thursday, December 1, 2016

Text: Isaiah 40:1-2a

"Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to _____, and cry to her that she has served her term..."

Text: Psalm 147:3

"He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds."

It was the middle of the night as she lay near death. Nineteen years old, mother of two little girls and dying of AIDS. We met at church when she was thirteen. She came almost every Sunday to bring her sisters. They received love, acceptance, food and clothing when it was necessary. She was a pretty tough cookie...I didn't know why except that her life was hard. I learned that her mom was a crack addict and when her mom didn't have money for her drugs she bartered her daughter as payment. The child asked for her pastor and he was called. She wanted to be baptized before she died. Her mother refused to allow it. She died two days later.

Let us pray: *Lord, you love your lambs. You seek those who are lost and bring them into your fold. As we wait for your return, help us to be actively waiting. Give us courage to invite, to speak of your love to those whom we see as unlovable, to see you in each one we meet. Amen.*



Friday, December 2, 2016

Text: Luke 1:26-31

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee call Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.'"

The text, as it continues, isn't really about Mary but rather what God is able to do. However, don't you wonder about Mary and her waiting time? Doesn't it seem like her nine months must have been really difficult? The waiting for this child, conceived by the Holy Spirit? Perhaps life just continued on. It does, for many women. They continue working, exercising, and preparing. In the beginning time flies by but as the birthing comes near, time slows. Our bodies stretch out, it's impossible to tie one's shoes and the bathroom is very far away no matter where it is! How long,, O Lord? How long? Did Mary wonder? Did she doubt? I suppose it helped to have Elizabeth in the same boat with her...one elderly and one barely out of childhood...both waiting for God's miracle. Did she rub her belly and dream of the predictions of the Angel? What do we do with our waiting?

Let us pray: *Lord, you have promised that our waiting will bear fruit. Be with us, we pray, as we wait for Jesus to come again. Help our waiting to be fruitful and filled with hope. Amen.*



Saturday, December 3, 2016

Text: Isaiah 55:12

"For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

We were driving to the vineyard, my son, daughter-in-law and Anders, my grandson. He's almost five and very bright. The traffic was tight as it always is in the San Francisco Bay area. The weather was misty...end of the dry season and the beginning of a fruitful time. The grass was greening up, flowers were beginning to blossom. In an effort to waylay the inevitable "Are we there yet?" we were looking out the car windows to see what we could see. Anders was not happy about the rain because it meant he had to wear his boots. You can't run fast in rain boots! I pointed out the flowers blooming on the side of the freeway, and the trees and the greening of the grass. All of God's creation was happy for the drink of water they were receiving. He said, "The hills are happy too, Grandma!" "Yes, Anders, the hills are clapping their hands and the trees are dancing."

Let us pray: *Lord, give us a drink of the life-giving waters of salvation. We wait for Jesus to come again, for the hills to clap their hands. Amen.*

