

**1 Corinthians 1:3-9**  
**First Sunday of Advent**

**Mark 13:24-37**

**November 29, 2020**

## **HURRY UP AND WAIT**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

On Thursday, July 19, 1990, I was sitting at the desk in our study at the Stanley White Presbyterian Church in Roanoke Rapids, NC when the telephone rang. The caller was the social worker from the adoption agency, who said, “I’m calling to let you know when your baby boy is arriving.” She told me we needed to be at the Philadelphia, PA airport in time to meet a 7:00 p.m. flight. She also told me what paperwork we needed to have with us. As she was about to end the call, I said, “Wait! What day are you talking about?” and she replied, “Oh, I forgot to tell you . . . next Wednesday, July 25.”

The phone call “came out of the blue” — sort of! We had been waiting for three and a half years to complete what was supposed to be a 9-10 month process. Because of numerous red-tape delays, the process dragged on and on and on. At one point, the adoption agency representative suggested we start over again, but we had too much time, energy, and emotion invested to do that. We had been told all along that “one day” we would get the phone call. We were matched with an infant boy in February 1990 and told he would arrive from South Korea in April. Then the process was delayed again, and we didn’t know when we would get “the call.”

But “the call” finally came, so we packed our little car full of vacation luggage and baby gear (but no baby) and headed to Brunswick County. On Tuesday afternoon we received another call from the agency. “The flight has been canceled. We don’t know when your baby will arrive,” the woman told us. To say we were depressed would be an understatement! However, twenty-four hours later, the phone rang again and the woman said, “Same time, same place, tomorrow.” So, on Thursday, July 26, we drove to RDU airport, bought two round trip tickets (when the ticket agent asked, “Do you know how expensive that is going to be?” I said, “I don’t care how much it costs — just get us to Philadelphia!”), flew to Philly, waited a few hours in the airport, welcomed our son Jackson, flew back to Raleigh-Durham, spent the night in a hotel by the airport, and drove back to Holden Beach the next day.

“Hurry up and wait!” That’s the way it felt throughout the adoption process. “We need the paperwork and documents ASAP,” so we’d send them and then hear nothing. As the weeks stretched out to months and the months stretched out to years, it was sometimes hard to wait, but wait we did — because we were waiting with hope! (Fortunately, when we adopted Natalie, the whole process was completed in thirteen months!)

“Hurry up and wait!” That phrase has been traced back to the U.S. Army and used to describe the “day-to-day grind of soldiers where they have to ‘hurry up’ to point B only to have to wait hours for the event to occur.”<sup>1</sup> The phrase is also used to describe

the experience of needing to be on time for an event that does not start for a good while.

“Hurry up and wait!” That’s a pretty good description of where we find ourselves on this first Sunday of Advent 2020. Actually, that describes where Christians have found themselves for the last 2,000 years — navigating life between the first advent or coming of Jesus at Christmas and his promised second advent/coming again “some day.” As the weeks stretch out to months and the months stretch out to years, it’s sometimes hard to wait and to live with the joyful sense of expectation that God’s promises are true and will be fulfilled. But, as the first candle in the Advent wreath reminds us, we wait with hope.

Pun intended, the watchword of this story from Mark 13 is “Watch!” or “Be alert!” But, that’s hard to do when time moves on and you are preoccupied with the daily grind. After all, it’s been almost 2,000 years since Jesus promised, “I’ll be back!” Already at the end of the first century A.D. or the beginning of the second century A.D., scoffers were ridiculing the promise of Christ’s return. They said, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!” But the apostle Peter had a ready response to their cynicism, “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:4,9)

A while back I read an article called “To Get a Sense of God’s Time, Take Off Your Watch.” That’s such a hard thing for us to do, what with our calendars and watches and clocks and smart-phone reminders. “Our” time has to do with what’s called *chronos* time (e.g., chronology) — measuring time as moving forward, day after day, hour after hour. “God’s” time has more to do with what is called *kairos* time or, as Richard Rohr calls it, “deep time.” Here’s how the apostle Paul describes what God has done in God’s time: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

*Kairos* time is ***the right time, the favorable time, God’s time***. God’s timing was right when he sent Jesus the first time, to redeem us that we might be adopted as God’s children. And if God’s timing was right in the past, we can live with assurance for the future and the present. As an author puts it in an article called “Living a Kairos Life in a Chronos World,” “When Jesus came, it was a fulfillment of promises past, a cosmic collision of the sacred and secular . . . It was a perfect moment. . . . This godly *kairos* pierced its way into creation at just the right time, slicing through *chronos* with a cry of a baby in a manger . . . *Kairos* moments then — and now — allow us to get a glimpse of the ‘other side.’ We peek around the corner at eternity. We actually glimpse how God works.”<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly and most important, in Advent as we look to the past and remember what God has done and peek around the corner at eternity at what God has promised to do, we discover what we are called to do right now, right here, in the present. During Advent, we sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and “While We are Waiting, Come” and we pray “Come, Lord Jesus!” But, as someone has pointed out, Jesus is already

present among us, calling us to live faithful lives, inviting us to follow in his ways, encouraging us in our faith walks, especially when it feels like life is nothing but “Hurry up and wait!”

Mark wrote his gospel for believers who were living through difficult, challenging, and uncertain times. Their life situation did not seem to offer much hope. But, in Mark’s gospel, the very first words Jesus says are, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15) God’s arrival in Jesus Christ, then and now and in the future, is good news/gospel. It’s worth waiting for. It’s what gives us hope, not just for the future, but especially for these difficult, challenging, and uncertain times.

When I was studying the gospel of Mark on my sabbatical in the summer of 2018, I ordered a book called *Journeying with Mark: Reflections on the Gospel*. The book follows Mark’s story through the Christian year, beginning with Advent. Listen to these words about the Advent message of Mark 13 (which, strangely enough, takes place just before Jesus is killed in Jerusalem) and see if they aren’t words we desperately need to hear and live by in these waning days of what has been a most difficult year:

“The season of Advent reminds us that whatever it might feel like now, we are not abandoned. . . what is sure is that the God who nurtured this world into existence has not abandoned us, nor ever will. The Gospel proclaims that God has created within time a means of a future — to seep into the present in order to change it in hope. Hope gives meaning to the present by conveying meaning about our future. It can help us live by trust with the tentative, the confusing, the fearful bits of the jigsaw that won’t be forced into the framework or picture. . . Hope is proclaimed when we seek to listen and understand rather than speak and judge. Hope is nurtured when we choose love over hate, peace over war; when we choose the gaps in our understanding and knowledge rather than the security of wanting always to be right. Hope can enlighten our world when we care amid the selfishness of complacency.”<sup>3</sup>

“Hurry up and wait!” That’s the paradox of Advent and the Christian life. But we don’t wait without hope, nor do we wait and twiddle our thumbs. Instead, as the words of the benediction I have been using the last few weeks encourage us, “In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, let us strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth, praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

***Let us pray: O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that, when he shall appear, he may not find us sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> “hurry up and wait,” at [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com).

<sup>2</sup>“Living a Kairos Life in a Chronos World,” produced by The High Calling, found at [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org).

<sup>3</sup>James Woodward, Paula Gooder, and Mark Pryce, *Journeying with Mark: Reflections on the Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), pp. 19, 24-25.