

Be with us in our waiting, illuminate your path for us, and help us hear your wisdom. Oh God, our great creator, Amen.

Here we are. Happy new liturgical year! Today begins a new season in the church year, the season of Advent. A season of waiting and great anticipation. As with anything new, it also comes with anxiety and uncertainty. Both of my grandmothers were women of faith, and I got my love for the church from them. My paternal grandmother sponsored me for confirmation, and I keep her Book of Common Prayer close by for inspiration. She inspired my love of the Advent season, and my maternal grandmother inspired my deep love of Christmas, but that's for a later sermon. You'll have to come back for that story. But my grandma Crompton lived a simple life. She grew up without much and worked in a shoe factory during WW2. She and my grandpa met, married, had my dad, and lived their lives. It was a good life. She loved to fish and garden, and she went to church every Sunday. She sat in the same pew, and the priest knew who she was. She was quiet at times and encouraged my imagination during the summers I spent with her growing up. We would go fishing together, and she would inevitably share some of her life wisdom with me, whether I wanted it or not. I was a kid, after all. I remember one morning, we were fishing, from the bank, at my Uncle Walter's Pond. and not a whole lot was biting. My grandma asked me how I knew I had a fish biting on my line. I told her what my dad had taught me, and she said, "Oh sure, that's one way, or you can feel it this way and showed me a new way to hold my pole. I then asked her what would happen if we didn't catch any fish that day, and she looked at me with a soft smile and said, "We'll just have to stop by the store and pick some up. I'm sure no one will know. I just started laughing, and she continued saying fishing should never be about what you catch unless you need the food, but about how you spend your time waiting while you're fishing and how you honor what God has created. Always be purposeful with your waiting". Her words and wisdom have always stuck with me. "Always be purposeful with your waiting".

In our text for today, Jesus is taking us to the end as we work our way towards the beginning. We see in Mark's text two sections pointing towards an idea of when Jesus might return and the signs to look for. In the first section, we see examples of celestial and natural signs often seen in apocalyptic texts. Texts that point us toward the end times. Scripture, which would have made sense for a people trying to make meaning of many unknowns as they await the return of Jesus. Drawing from texts like Isaiah, which talk about the magnitude of what it is to be in the presence of God.

Next, Jesus shares a parable about the Fig tree, ending with the warning to keep watch. This text is beneficial in grounding us in what was at stake for the early Christian Communities. Their waiting was specific. Yet, as we read it today, we understand the text in our own unique context. We continue to wait as well. I wonder where might we find hope in this text for our time and place?

While I draw a great deal of hope from knowing that we are at the beginning, we can't fast forward past the endings.

I want to invite us into a space of reflection and anticipation over the next few weeks. An invitation to not move past a season of reflecting on what has been, in pursuit of thinking too quickly about what is yet to come.

We must remain awake to our present moment.

This text is asking us to keep watch, to be ready. To deal with those things that would keep us from being as strong as we could be as a community.

This might mean we must let go of something or reorganize our priorities.

While the answers aren't in this text, only an invitation to keep going. To keep discerning, to keep sitting in the question as we move forward in this season of Advent.

This text is calling us to be awake to God in the world around us.

So, as we spend the next several weeks in preparation for what is to come.

It is important not to be so distracted by the busyness of the season that we forget the real reason for the season.

I'm curious what questions are on our hearts. What questions can we sit in during this season?

How might God be calling us to turn outward towards our neighbors? Who might need a little extra love this time of year?

While we keep watch it can be helpful to remember that sometimes God moments show up in unexpected ways. Just as my grandma was teaching me how to fish and explained that it's not always about catching fish but how you spend your time on the lake.

This text invites us to look around and open our hearts and eyes, to keep watch and prepare for what is to come.

My prayer is that we are filled with God's spirit as we keep watch for the mysteries yet to come.

That God opens us up to the discomfort of waiting and the beauty of God's presence in the mystery of Advent.

# Amen