

For those who were here last Sunday, you will have heard Walter Stewart speak about the end of our church year and the Reign of Christ. Walter concluded his presentation with the words, “Happy New Year.”

Today, I am going to start with this greeting , and it’s the same greeting I used last year – “We have arrived! Happy New Year.” Now, the difference between last week, the Reign of Christ the King Sunday, and this week is this, beginning today we have gone from the old church year to a new church year. Today is the first Sunday in Advent in the third year of our three-year lectionary calendar. And Advent is the first season in this new church year. Some of you may wonder where we get the readings from for each Sunday, and how we know which lection cycle we are in? I use McCausland’s Order of Divine Service. Now, there are other sources available, but our Anglican Communion here in Canada and in the USA have agreed that McCausland’s is one acceptable source. And I chose to follow the lectionary as it is found in this guide.

As I said last year on the first Sunday of Advent, Advent is a season of anticipation, a time of waiting for the coming of the Christ-child. We have a variety of service options available to us in the season of Advent. And beyond the liturgical celebration of the coming birth of Jesus in the Christmas story, a story I believe most of us will remember without much prompting, there are many other services to chose from, the

service of Lessons and Carols, Christmas Hymn sing-along, and Blue Christmas, just to name a few. Advent is a time of anticipation for the coming of the Christ-child once again. Yet we are also a people living in the early decades of this 21st century and as humans, we are looking forward to Christmas as a time for sharing gifts, seeing the Christmas decorations, singing carols, eating the many foods we love, and in gathering with family and friends. And this year, we have hope for the future, hope rooted in our faith that God is about to lead us in a new direction under the leadership of a new incumbent in our parish.

You see, we are waiting for much more than the things that affect us as individuals. Here at All Saints by the sea, we are waiting for, and anticipating, the arrival of a new spiritual leader, one we hope will help us understand what it is God is asking us to do here on Salt Spring Island. I also believe we all share in prayer that we will live to see the day our Christian beliefs are seen to be aligned with the beliefs of all people who believe in the Creator, no matter what denomination, faith tradition, of culture they may be. And that we might have world peace.

In this gospel passage from Luke's gospel, there is more than meets our ears. It is a call for us to be watchful for deception. And our world is full of things meant to deceive. From Luke,

we hear this, 'Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.'

We are to watch for and to call out those things that are sources of environmental, political, social, and cosmic calamity in this age. But what was Jesus telling his followers to do. Jesus told the disciples to watch, to pay attention, to look for deception, to watch out for their own wellbeing, to watch and be ready for the difficult days ahead. What does it mean to be watchful? It means having our eyes open, to use our senses to see what is happening around us, to not be blinded by misconception, deception, and malfeasance. We must be ready spiritually, mentally, and physically. And this might mean that we will lose sleep if we are to be vigilant. No easy task, is it?

So, what is at stake if we permit our senses to be dulled? What might happen to our human race if we do not hold fast against all that causing the destruction of our world? What do we risk if we, who are God's people, fail to remain awake, fail to remain watchful, and fail to be vigilant in the face of the crises facing our world? And if we fail to see the signs, as Luke

writes, “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.’ What might happen next?

As a society, we are faced with climate change, international conflict, issues within our own country, and uncertainty in our own community. As the months go by, we continue to wait, to watch, and to work as God’s people. We remain engaged in the work of discipleship in the world, as we did even in the time of the COVID pandemic. This is exactly what Jesus told the disciples to do when he would no longer be with them. Jesus taught the disciples about His second coming. While they watched and waited for that day, they were to be actively growing the kingdom of God. The waiting and watching for the return of Jesus Christ, the Risen Saviour could have been challenging for the disciples. They may even have become easily disillusioned. Yet, they would come to understand that the work of growing the kingdom of heaven would be no easy task. But they did not lose heart, nor did they lose faith. They persevered, and we must do the same.

Today, we face an unknown future of lives in crisis. We do not know what our world will look like in the coming year. Yet we are sure of one thing, God is with us through all our waiting, watching, and hoping. And here at All Saints by the sea, we remain united in faith, prayer, and hope, even though we are unsure. Our future path may still seem unclear. One thing we know for sure from today's gospel reading, Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer and King, will return and will take all his chosen people to abide in the realms of the kingdom of heaven. So it has been written in the words of Luke's gospel, and we have heard it proclaimed here, once again. Amen.