

## “Living Expectantly”

**Sermon preached by Reverend Carmen Garrigan**  
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**Beavercreek, OH**  
**December 2, 2007**  
**Texts: Matthew 24:36-51**

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we long to know You more. We pray this Advent season that you would come into our lives in a new way. Open our hearts to the movement of the Holy Spirit, open our eyes to signs of Your coming Kingdom and open our ears to Your Word which never fades. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Today marks the start of Advent. Advent is the season in the church year that means “coming.” It is during this time each year that we make extra space in our lives to remember how the people of Israel waited for the coming of the Messiah. At the end of Advent we celebrate the culmination of this waiting: the birth of Christ our Lord. Yet there is still another event that we anticipate during the Advent season that gets less publicity in Hallmark stores: the second coming of Christ.

When our incoming Pastor David Brown and I were preparing this series and considering emphasizing the second coming of Christ for this year’s Advent sermons, I loved the phrase he used, “We aren’t just talking about cute babies here.” I think the secular world can enjoy the scenes depicting Jesus as a baby in a manger. All is calm; all is bright as we sway back and forth to the words of *Silent Night*. Enjoying the scenes associated with the second coming of Christ is something entirely different. I’d love to hear your most creative ideas for ornaments that pertain to Christ’s second coming. Somehow I don’t think Hallmark would want them though.

Even within the Church there is great misunderstanding about the second coming of Christ. There have been many predictions about the day and the hour, but of course those moments in time did not unfold as anticipated. Some draw up timelines, others don’t give much thought to the fact that Christ will return. While Scripture certainly doesn’t answer all of our questions about Christ’s second coming, it does tell us everything we need to know in order to be ready. Our passage this morning emphasizes two important warnings in regards to Christ’s return that can be countered by two appropriate responses.

The first warning we were given in this morning’s passage is this: Jesus’ return will be sudden and unexpected. Scripture is clear when it says that no one but God the Father knows the day or hour when the Son of Man will come again. The unexpectedness of His coming is described as being like a thief in the night. Jesus tells how people will be going about their ordinary and daily lives when He returns.

It is rare for us as a people to contemplate that our meeting the Lord could happen any day. We expect ordinary life to go on and that we will have considerable warning to prepare ourselves to meet face to face with our Savior. Those depicted in our passage today had no extra words of warning before it happened. Those who lived expectantly, and whose lives were ready, had a wonderful future to enter into, the others did not.

Sean and I have a set of friends that we like to drop in on unexpectedly. Usually I am the one that keeps track of and plans our social engagements for the family. If you want to do something with Sean, he will usually send you to me to check on his availability. When it comes to our friends the Millers, however, I leave the planning to Sean as he has way more history with them than I do. Nathan Miller is a good friend of Sean's from High School. They started a prayer ministry together during High School and have been good friends ever since. Usually we like to see them when we spend a day in LA visiting Sean's family. Somehow, even though there are so many other things in our lives that get planned out in advance, our visits with the Millers are not one of those things. Usually Jen or Nathan will get a call as we are driving from San Diego to LA. Our end goes something like this: "Hey, hope you are doing well. We are going to be in Pasadena today. Are you available to get together for dinner tonight?" Somehow, out of all of our visits to Pasadena, we have not given these wonderful folks any more notice than that. The beautiful thing is that we have always been able to see them, and usually they even prepare a meal for us. When we leave we tell them to be ready, because you never know the day or the hour the Garrigans will come to town. To be ready for our unforeseen coming they have learned to live expectantly.

What is the encouraged response to the warning of Jesus' imminent but unknown hour of return?  
Keep watch and be ready.

There is a family in our midst that has had to learn to keep watch and be ready in a special way in recent months. Being ready for a call at any hour of the night or day is a vivid reality for a couple prepared to be foster parents. As I studied our passage and the stern warnings to be ready and watchful, the actions of PJ and Diana in preparing their lives to welcome a foster child came to mind as a beautiful example of how we, as followers of Christ, should have our lives ready to meet Him. So I asked Dianna to tell me more about their experience of preparing for and waiting to receive a foster child. She graciously allowed me to share her thoughts with you.

Before the Conboys took all the necessary classes to become foster parents they worked on preparing themselves mentally for the challenge. They met with those closest to them to make sure they had all the support they would need. After the classes and meeting with a case worker they underwent a home study so that the case worker could make the best match between them and a child or children.

Then they had the task of preparing a space in their home for the infant, child, or children they could be asked to welcome at a moment's notice. They needed to be prepared for a girl or a boy and that child might range in age from a newborn to six years old. They might also be asked to care for siblings. While there were many unknowns about the child or children they would eventually be asked to care for, they could only do their part: get ready as best they could, wait, stay ready, and wait some more. At first the waiting was exciting. When the phone rang they

thought that maybe it was THE call. But as the waiting continued they began to wonder if it was ever going to actually happen.

Finally a call came to P.J. in the middle of the day from the woman who was replacing their previous case worker. She wanted to do a home study of her own and as they would find out later she wanted to meet them in person to verify that they would be a good match for a soon to be born child.

At the end of the visit the caseworker indeed thought they would be a good match and inquired into their willingness to care for an infant who had been exposed to drugs during gestation. Neither wanted to agree on the spot so that they could make sure the other person was up for it. As they closed their meeting with the case worker they said they would think about it and get back to her. As soon as the caseworker left they house they exchanged glances and words to ascertain the other's intent. They were in agreement "go get her, we'll take the baby." Then came the waiting for the birth of the child. It could be a month, it could be a day.

Yet on the morning of Halloween, another call came. The baby had been born and the case worker wanted to bring the child to their home the next day. Their preparations and readiness had finally borne fruit.

I am sure that having a heart and home ready to care for a child at little notice was no easy task.

Keeping our lives ready for the return of Christ is also no insignificant job. Jesus says, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns." If we are staying on course in the work our Lord has given us we are called blessed and will be rewarded when our master returns. We too are called to daily prepare and watch for His second advent into our world.

Our passage also warns us about judgment for those who are idle and unfaithful in the work they have been given. While there is great happiness and joy for the wise servant who has been faithful, there is also woeful judgment reserved for the servant who is neither ready for his master's return nor wholeheartedly dedicated to the responsibilities entrusted to him. While I think it is usually best to focus on God's grace and mercy, we must also recognize that there will be a final day when our master will return and the door that was once open will then be shut. God's judgment is real and it is silly for us to think that it is forever away.

During college and seminary there was a family for whom I did a lot of kid and house-sitting. On one particular occasion the parents had the opportunity to go to Hawaii and I was left in charge of their three girls- one preschooler and two middle school students. We had a great week together and I carried out my duties as faithfully as I knew how. On the last day the parents had said they would be arriving in the early afternoon. I remember waking up at 6:30 AM that morning to the sound of the garage door opening. Adrenaline filled my body. I was still in bed and had not packed my things. I had certainly not expected them at that hour. Fortunately I had made sure that the house was in decent order the night before, otherwise I

would have really panicked. So I met them in the hall in my pajamas rubbing my still sleepy eyes. “Wow, you are back already!?”

When it comes to meeting our Savior face to face, I certainly don’t want to be found rubbing my sleepy eyes saying “Wow, you are back already!?” I’d much rather be able to say “it is wonderful that this hour has finally come. I have been preparing for it all of my life.”

How can we live in light of the warning of God’s coming judgment and Christ’s imminent return? Be faithful and diligent in Kingdom work.

I love getting to know the lives of Christ’s servants who haven’t wasted a day of their lives when it comes to Kingdom work. The richness of how they have spent their lives is spectacular. They clearly embody what the Bible teaches: you can never be too young to serve Christ and you are never old enough to retire from ministry.

I love pastoring teens because I have the opportunity to point them to a life of serving God. They don’t have to wait until they graduate from college or are married to be effective workers in Christ’s kingdom. Rather, they can build their lives on His Word from a young age and enjoy the blessings of serving Christ for all the days of their lives.

Yet I draw my own inspiration from those who have been faithful in ministry for many decades. I enjoy hearing stories of God’s faithfulness in their lives and how God used them as a vessel for His mercy and grace in ways more astonishing than they ever could have imagined when they were young. Quick bursts of following God here and there don’t quite leave the same legacy behind.

In light of Christ’s second coming and having heard the warnings and responses that our Scripture passage has given us today, there are some important questions each of us needs to ask ourselves.

The first is: Am I ready to encounter the Lord of all, face to face? Maybe understanding the claims of Scripture is something that you’ve been putting off. You’ve wanted to check into that man called Jesus, but you don’t seem to have the time. I urge you; don’t wait to consider such important matters. Make learning about Who Christ is your most important priority.

Maybe you know plenty about Jesus, but your way of life doesn’t currently reflect all you know. I urge you; don’t be caught rubbing your sleepy eyes and saying “Wow, you are back already!?” Evaluate the priorities of your life in light of Christ’s return. If Christ returned tomorrow would you be excited or ashamed to share with Him what you have been doing while He’s been away? If you knew that Christ was coming back at any point in the next five years, how would you live your life differently?

The second question I have for us is this: To whom am I called to tell about Jesus? When it comes to sharing the good news about salvation through Christ with those who are most dear to us, we often operate under the notion that they and we are immortal and there is all the time in the world. While we must be patient for the seed of God’s Word to grow in people’s hearts, I

pray that along with patience for His timing, that God would give us a sense of urgency to share the gospel.

The final question I have for us this morning is: Have you been faithful with the work the Lord has entrusted to you? Maybe God has put you in charge of spiritually feeding a small group Bible Study, a Sunday school class or the precious children that God has called you to raise. Have you been carrying out your responsibilities to care for your flock with wisdom, diligence and faithfulness? Whether the task seems mundane or overwhelming, you can be sure that whatever work God has given you, it is of immense value for His kingdom.

“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” (Matt. 24:44).