



Watching and Waiting

Study One



Bahrain Pottery Creator, pic Clairissa Simmons



When there is something about to happen in your life - big or small - how do you usually pass the time while you wait?

1) Wanted: Potter

(Read Isaiah 64:1–9)

‘Yet you, Lord, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.’ (v8)

How often, when life frustrates or annoys us, do we utter those well-known words, ‘Oh, how I miss the good old days!’ whilst forgetting - or ignoring - some of the less positive aspects of our personal history!

This passage is a psalm of lament. The writer is speaking for a people returned from exile but frustrated, longing for God to act the in the way He once did – to be seen and heard in mountains and nations trembling, the kind of unmistakable but unexpected intervention their ancestors had told stories about.

What there is now is silence, a struggling people, and a prophet desperate for God

to be seen again alongside his people. And yet the passage doesn’t end in despair, but in one of the Old Testament’s most tender images, ‘we are the clay, and you are our potter’ - trusting that even an unshaped and unfinished clay like these people are, remain something God is still forming.

Waiting on God can be difficult and frustrating, especially when the world’s brokenness seems to go unanswered.

Discuss..

'O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!' What do you hear in this cry - longing, desperation, frustration, hope - or perhaps all of these?

The people remember what God has done in the past and ask God to act again. When we face difficult times, how can remembering God's faithfulness in the past help us to hope for the future?

The image of clay and potter suggests being shaped by something we don't control. Have you experienced this in your own faith journey, and in what way?

Are there situations in our world or our own lives where you find yourself praying Isaiah's prayer: 'Come, Lord, and make a difference here'?

2) Imperfect, but blessed

(Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–9)

'God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.'
(v9)

Paul is writing to a church that, though blessed, was deeply divided – by allegiances to rival groups, social and economic status, arrogance over differing gifts, sexual immorality, and arguments around the Lord's table (v.10ff).

However, Paul begins his letter not with criticism but thanksgiving, praising God for the grace and spiritual gifts these people have received, 'enriching their lives in every way'.

For a church often characterised by argument, its members need to remind themselves of all that God has done for them and embrace this within their daily lives. They have everything they require to be the people God wants them to be, if they will simply stay alert in their wait for God's kingdom to be revealed in all its glory through Jesus Christ.

Discuss..

Paul could easily have begun this letter by criticising a church that was struggling, but he doesn't. What does this say about our own conversations around church and faith?

'He will keep you firm to the end' is a promise about the future, not a description of the present. How do we hold onto a promise like that if the present looks like Corinth?

Waiting is a major theme as we journey through Advent. How do Paul's words help us on our way?

3) Be on your guard

(Read Mark 13:24–37)

‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.’ (v31)

Jesus describes cosmic upheaval, with the sun darkened and stars falling, whilst talking about the end times when people will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory’. He then suddenly shifts to things much smaller and more practical, a tree, someone going on a journey and leaving servants in charge, each with their tasks, and the one on the door keeping watch.

Jesus knows that his followers will face times when the world feels uncertain and frightening. His message isn’t that they should work out exactly when everything will happen, but that they should stay awake. ‘Keep watch,’ he says, because you don’t know when the time will come.

We can spend a lot of time trying to predict what is going to happen next, worrying about what might go wrong, or longing for things to return to how they were in ‘the good old days!’ Jesus instead calls us to live faithfully in the present.

Advent is not simply a countdown to Christmas. It is an invitation to stay awake to God’s presence — to notice what God is doing, to remain hopeful, and to be ready to welcome Christ whenever and wherever he comes to us.



Domenico Ghirlandaio - Christ in Heaven with Four Saints and a Donor, c1492

Discuss..

Why do you think Jesus moves from dramatic cosmic imagery to something as ordinary as a household staying alert?

What does ‘the lesson from the fig tree’ say to us spiritually today?

In your own journey of faith what have you learned about God’s timing?

What does ‘staying awake’ or ‘watching’ spiritually look like in the actual rhythm of your week, especially during a busy December?

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
as we journey through Advent,
help us to wait with hope,
to listen with open hearts,
and to make room for Christ in our lives.
When we are busy, help us to be still.
When we are discouraged, renew our hope.
When we are distracted, turn our eyes towards you.
And when we see your light,
help us to share it with others.
Go with us into the week ahead.
May we carry your peace in our hearts,
your love in our actions,
and your hope in all that we do.

And a blessing -
May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace as we trust in him.
May Christ walk with us through the week ahead,
and may the light of his presence shine through us wherever we go.
Amen.

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness."
Desmond Tutu