

Sunday December 26
 Lesson 4: Jesus is Waiting
 Scripture: Rev. 3:20 – 4:11

Context:

The winter Adult Bible Studies Curriculum continues its focus on the season of Advent and Christmas with an examination of waiting and how we can engage in practices and means to connect to God. As we participate in the communities we live in, we discover God is already at work and invites us to continue to lend our gifts and graces to the work to God's goodness. The final lesson today concludes this unit on how we can find God in waiting and anticipation.

The text comes from the book of Revelation, the final book of the New Testament and Bible. The passage today comes from a larger section from the beginning of the book. The unit begins as part of "the letters to the seven churches" and the last verses of chapter three act as benediction of sorts.¹ In the chapters before, the author John of Patmos has given prophetic messages to the various churches along with visions to speak to the concerns of the people.

The context of John's letter and addressing of each church reveals some of the issues the Christian church was facing. The members of John's churches were adherents of a minority religion in an environment of conflicting religious pluralism.² There were the Jewish synagogues and the pagan religions, especially the emperor cult, placing Christians on the margins of their own culture.³ And this does not even begin to cover the issues and tensions between the churches as there was miscommunication and various individuals jockeying for power.

As such, John tells all the churches in the third chapter about who they are loyal to and where they should focus their Christian responsibility. Using a metaphor for hospitality, John speaks of what Jesus is asking of the churches. He wants to be able to knock on their doors and be treated as if he has been there all along. Jesus wants to be a part of their lives, much like being a part of a dinner party where all have a place and there is good food and conversation. Jesus wants the churches to not listen to the voices of the world around them. Jesus wants the church to listen to the Holy Spirit and the nudges for them to be the church.

What follows is a scene of worship Jesus invites the people to behold. Pulling on allusions based on his contextual understanding of a throne room and even the Roman pomp and circumstance, John makes a political statement of who is truly in charge. Jesus is inviting the people not to imagine some distant scene for after they die; he is inviting them to see what he offers to them today. Jesus is knocking for them to open up and

¹ Boring, Eugene M. "Revelation," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2011), 85.

² *Ibid.*, 91.

³ *Ibid.*

follow him.

Application

As we read this text following Christmas day, we might wonder why the book of Revelation was chosen. After all, Revelation is at the end and it is a misunderstood book, full of mystery and images which might terrify us. If you're in certain areas of the United States, you've probably heard sermons from this book which have terrified you to your very core.

Yet if we look to the context of John and we look to the context of today, we see how the book of Revelation is a book of hope. It is not just a chronicle of our Heaven tour early for when we die as it is a glimpse into the transformation Jesus offers us here today. It is a reminder to us how God calls us to a life of worship, following the one who is the ultimate Lord of Lords and King of Kings. And he is the one who has claimed you and me, inviting us to follow him in order to have our lives turned upside down and transformed.

When I went to St. Paul's Cathedral in London a few years ago, I was struck by a beautiful painting there. The painting is called *The Light of the World*, by William Holman-Hunt. The painting depicts Jesus knocking on a door as he holds a lit lantern in his other hand. The origin story of the painting comes from the gospel of John with its focus on Jesus as the light of the world and how Jesus calls out for those to follow him.

I have come to love this painting for multiple reasons from its classical style to the fact of its residing in one of the most holy places I've had the privilege to visit. As I read the text for this morning's lesson, this image came to my mind. Jesus constantly comes to the doors of our hearts and minds, asking if he might come in to bring enlightenment and understanding. He wants us to not be afraid or hide from the world, but instead follow him into it as his disciples.

We can spend our time reading passages such as these from Revelation trying to figure out the dimensions of the celestial court and see the call to wait until we go there. Or we can see this text as an invitation for hope and an opportunity to worship Jesus every day of our lives. We can see the gift God gives us here today for life anew.

The season of Christmas is one we have often forgotten to fully celebrate in the Christian church. I am not talking about adding another jingle or stick another candle on our wreaths. In the church we know about the importance of Advent and waiting for this special day. What I love about Christmas though is how the story is just beginning. In the days after Christmas, we celebrate how Christ has been born and we are called to rejoice with thanksgiving.

Yet we are also reminded of how we are given an invitation. As we celebrate God in the flesh and God among us, we are invited to join God in the good work being done around us. God wants us to see how Christ with us isn't just about him coming to die and atone for our sins, attempting to surpass the life and ministry of Jesus. Instead, we go into the season of Epiphany, looking for the ways Jesus wants to light up our lives or maybe even knock on our doors and get us out of our complacency or apathy. Jesus comes to knock on our hearts and lives hoping we will respond and join in his mission. Will you open the door for Jesus to change your world?

How can Revelation be read as a book to give hope and consolation? Why do you think God wants us to not just focus on getting to heaven when we die? What are the ways you can participate God's kingdom in the here and now? Are there pieces of art which inspire you in your walk with Jesus? How does the season of Christmas inspire joy and awe in you?

For a copy of the painting, click the link below to visit St. Paul's Cathedral:

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/history-collections/the-collections/collections-highlights/the-light-of-the-world>

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