

The longing of our souls is satisfied only by Jesus.

“Advent is a season of the liturgical year observed in most Christian denominations as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for both the celebration of the Nativity of Christ at Christmas and the return of Christ at the Second Coming.”

Our goal for this Advent is to look around and recognize the environment in which we wait. The struggles, the uncertainty, the opportunity, the ache of humanity.

This is “The Long Wait.” And we will see from Scripture seasons of waiting and expectation... and find their end in Christ. We will see our own seasons of waiting and expectation... and find their end in Christ.

And my desire is that we would go for it and feel all the feels. Be fully acquainted with our grief so that we can find satisfaction in the the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief.

Grief is extra in our cultural moment. As I have been studying I can't help but come across new studies or reports on the crisis of grief in our day.

“The pandemic – and the political battles and economic devastation that have accompanied it – have inflicted unique forms of torment on mourners, making it harder to move ahead with their lives than with a typical loss, said sociologist Holly Prigerson, co-director of the Cornell Center for Research on End-of-Life Care in New York...The scale and complexity of pandemic-related grief have created a public health burden that could deplete Americans' physical and mental health for years, leading to more depression, substance misuse, suicidal thinking, sleep disturbances, heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure and impaired immune function.” Liz Sabo in USAToday

Whatever the trauma, we live in a day that seems to require we live in responsiveness rather than grief. Getting through the day prevents us from grieving. Our political views prevent us from grieving. We are conditioned to speak instead of pausing to process. The delayed grief of the last two years is creating a crisis that perhaps humanity has never had to confront on such a scale.

David Kessler: “Understanding the stages of grief is a start. But whenever I talk about the stages of grief, I have to remind people that the stages aren't linear and may not

happen in this order. It's not a map but it provides some scaffolding for this unknown world. There's **denial**, which we say a lot of early on: This virus won't affect us. There's **anger**: You're making me stay home and taking away my activities. There's **bargaining**: Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right? There's **sadness**: I don't know when this will end. And finally there's **acceptance**. This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed... Acceptance, as you might imagine, is where the power lies. We find control in acceptance."

What do we make of it as followers of Christ? Well, Advent is about the acceptance of longing in the midst of darkness. I think it is meant to help us.

"Advent is the season that, when properly understood, does not flinch from the darkness that stalks us all in this world. Advent begins in the dark and moves toward the light—but the season should not move too quickly or too glibly, lest we fail to acknowledge the depth of the darkness." Fleming Rutledge

So you don't run too fast to the Silent Night and you don't flinch at the darkness. She is right we can move too quickly there, we have to feel the journey for our good. But as we begin I want us to take the light with us. To face the darkness with brilliant light. So we anchor ourselves in the vision of Revelation.

"Our lives are eschatologically stretched between the sneak preview of the new world being born among us in the church, and the old world where the principalities and powers are reluctant to give way. In the meantime, which is the only time the church has ever known, we live as those who know something about the fate of the world that the world does not yet know. And that makes us different. —Will Willimon, Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition"

"grief is one longing of many that we have, but is especially heightened in our current cultural moment." Grief has our attention keenly at the moment, but it is among the things that reveal a deep longing in us for something more. And all those things, whatever they might be, will always come up short. Advent clues us in on this.

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Revelation 4 & 5

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Why begin at the end? Now we have many perspectives on John's vision in Revelation, and it's likely that some of them are wrong. There is much imagery that we can't quite

comprehend, but it is a book full of Old Testament references and the coolest nativity scene in the Bible - a woman in labor attacked by a dragon! But it was delivered to a church in crisis, facing hardship on all sides, and it was meant to bolster believers living through darkness.

Here, John has conveyed letters from Jesus to these churches and then immediately has a vision of the throne room in Heaven. As it is now not a millennia from now.

So like the church then, we can find hope in these truths now.

In chapter five especially, I think we see our longing, how it is met by the Lamb, and serves as our lasting hope.

The Longing for One Worthy

Humanity longs for something more than what we have. It is what drives us forward, what can be terribly twisted by the schemes of the world, or what can position us to find freedom. The “God-sized whole” in our hearts, or language like this, representing the sense that there is more than “this.” All that we would find this “more.”

“From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. 27 He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” -- **Acts 17:26-27** (CSB)

All of humanity, whether capable of recognizing it or not, longs for One worthy. For our Creator, for a Savior that can answer sin and brokenness, for a Spirit of hope and security.

Rebecca McLaughlin recounted last week watching Adele being interviewed by Oprah. Adele was saying she'd divorced her husband not because she didn't love him anymore, but because she wasn't "in love" with him anymore. Oprah said what a great message it was to women out there who also aren't 100% happily married. “There is so much evidence to show that this is in fact a terrible message. Marriage is not about locking into a state of being perpetually "in love" with one's spouse. Marriage is about locking into a commitment to love someone precisely when you're not feeling all the feels...But Adele's desire for something truly passionate & all-consuming is not wrong. She's just looking for it in the wrong place. Her real desire isn't for a better merely human husband. Her desire is for Jesus & only he can satisfy it. I pray she finds him. Or rather, he finds her.”

We see it in the mirror every day, we feel it, it is interwoven in all of our stories. Thinking of the Marvel universe, and in Endgame when the battle is underway, and the weapons are few. Thor's hammer can only be wielded by someone worthy - like Captain America.

We ache for someone worthy to wield the cosmic hammer of restoration and bring the world back into order. And in Revelation it is the scroll and its seals that requires One worthy.

Someone worthy to solve it all, to fix, to heal, to renew.

John feels it.

“Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides, sealed with seven seals. 2 I also saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look in it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or even to look in it.” --

Revelation 5:1-4 (CSB)

Who is worthy?

This is the question that matches the pain we feel. The sense of uncertainty. Is anyone worthy? We hear the flesh, world and devil say we are... but we have lived long enough to know that's not true. And it is unsettling.

This is the lament. John responds as expected. He weeps. Shedding tears over the ache that we feel.

We have to fight to not cover this longing with tinsel so as not to see it, or numb it with Grandpa's eggnog recipe. You are meant to feel it. The angst of what is incomplete, unfinished, broken, unexpected.

If I can only like daylight savings for one reason it is that it gets dark earlier. You are meant to see how dark the night is.

But it doesn't stay dark. The sun rises. Or better, the Son rises.

The Lamb Answers Our Longing

“Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” 6 Then I saw one like a slaughtered lamb standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth. 7 He went and took the scroll out of the right hand of the one seated on the throne.” -- **Revelation 5:5-7** (CSB)

This is where the waiting leads, this is what answers our longing. The Lamb.

Jesus is the one worthy. He unfolds his victory over sin and death and establishes his kingdom forever. He reigns, now and forevermore.

And this is vital for us. This is a picture of the present. The Lamb reigning. It is what bolstered the early church in the face of persecution, in the Colosseum facing lions. It is what carries us through.

Years ago I was being interviewed by a church and they got to a point where they were not sure they could abide my view of eschatology (last things/ end times). Not that my perspective is not mainstream, it just wasn't theirs. One of the members of the search committee thought he would set me straight and called me up to talk about it. “So what you are saying is that you believe Jesus is reigning over all things right now?” Absolutely. It struck me that he responded that he couldn't trust me to disciple his son with that perspective, “where is the hope in Jesus reigning now?”

Where is the hope in the opposite?!

It is true. Jesus is upholding the universe with the power of his word at this very moment. He reigns over all things. He is the Lamb that is worthy to open the scroll. He is the radiance that casts out the darkness.

He answers our longing by his blood.

“And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.” -- **Revelation 5:9-10** (CSB)

All human longing - the longing of all of creation is satisfied in Jesus. His sacrifice. His cross. This is why we run toward it every day. He is the anchor of our souls, he is what satisfies the longing we face each day. And he freely gives himself for us and to us, that we would find peace and freedom in him.

This truth equips us to face the longing for that final day - when restoration will finally be realized - the “it is done” declared from his throne.

The Lasting Hope

The truth is that our acquaintance with grief and the darkness that surrounds is not only for Advent. It is our daily experience and we live in the tension of knowing what satisfied our longing and grasping at imposters for that sense of wholeness.

But looking to the Lamb we can face that inner struggle, external difficulties, and whatever comes.

The Lamb is not far off. In fact if you are in Christ, have believed in him for salvation, you are seated in this very room that John describes.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! 6 He also raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus,” -- **Ephesians 2:4-6** (CSB)

We can't even fully grasp the magnitude of this promise. Right now, you are seated with Christ. You are as secure as Jesus is. And recognizing this gives us the energy to face our longing and trusting in the Lamb is where the Spirit moves among us.

It shapes how we grieve.

This is what Paul says to a church wrestling with the same longing, sense of grief. “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.” -- **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14** (CSB)

And it shapes how we live with our longing.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it — in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor

pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits – we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.” -- **Romans 8:18-25** (CSB)

Our hope is not in an end to death and pain but in the One who brings real life and eternity.

“Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels around the throne, and also of the living creatures and of the elders. Their number was countless thousands, plus thousands of thousands. 12 They said with a loud voice,

Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing! 13 I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say, Blessing and honor and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! 14 The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.” -- **Revelation 5:11-14** (CSB)

This is our reality, now. This is the light that carries us through the darkness and delivers us. This is the lasting hope that brings us home.

The longing of our souls is satisfied only by Jesus. Run to him.

What do we do as we wait?

Weep. It is okay to feel the pain, the loss, the uncertainty. The depth of our longing. Accepting it leads us to its satisfaction.

Pray. The prayers of the saints are incense in the throne room. See the Lord for help, hope, and holiness. Lament, give thanks, rejoice in him.

Worship. As the elders in Revelation, when satisfaction is found in Jesus we have nowhere else to turn, and worship, pouring out blessing on the Lamb, is our response.

“Abide with me, fast falls the eventide
The darkness deepens Lord, with me abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me”

The road is long, but we follow the only one who satisfies what our souls long for. Keep going. Your place is with him.

“May Almighty God, by whose Providence our Savior Christ came among us in great humility, sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin. Amen. May he whose second coming in power and great glory we await, make you steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and constant in love. Amen. May you who rejoice in the first advent of our Redeemer, at his second advent be rewarded with eternal life. Amen. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. Amen.”

– Fleming Rutledge, *Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ*