

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I want to speak today on one of the great Advent themes, waiting, a subject on which I have vast experience. I have always been an expert in waiting. Nearly all of my experience has come from my 32 very happy years of being married to my wife, Laura. I did some simple calculations and found out that in the last 32 years, I've spent the equivalent of four months outside women's bathrooms and seven months waiting in the car before we go out somewhere. Of course, I'm not alone in this. I don't know who came to this conclusion, but I read this week that Americans spend 37 billion hours per year waiting in line, or queuing, as we like to say in England, and nobody likes it.

Richard Larson of MIT concluded that waiting can provoke, and I quote, "Impatience, stress and anxiety, and in turn, anxiety also makes the wait seem longer". And in this digital age, we're getting even more impatient. Another researcher, Ramesh Sitaraman, has discovered that on average we wait just two seconds for our online videos to load. After five seconds, the abandonment rate is 25%. When you get to 10 seconds, half of us have gone, have given up waiting.

So we all need to learn to be patient, as waiting is part of life. And Advent teaches us that not all waiting is bad. We can learn the value of waiting so that what Peter says in our Epistle might be true of us. He says, "While you are waiting for these things, strive to be found at peace." Can we be said to be waiting in peace? Waiting is an Advent theme as we are mindful in Advent that we live between the times, between the now and the not yet of the coming kingdom.

And this becomes very clear in that Epistle from 2 Peter. "We are leading lives," Peter writes, "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God." That's the great day of the Lord that we were thinking about last week on Advent Sunday, when Christ shall return at the end of time to establish his new kingdom of justice and of peace. Three

times in this short passage from Peter, Peter talks about waiting. We wait for the coming day. We wait for the new heavens and a new earth. We are waiting for these things, striving to be found at peace.

And there are many references to waiting in scripture. There's many in the Psalms. One psalmist said, "My soul in silence waits." And the kind of waiting that Peter and the psalmist are talking about has a different feel to the kind of waiting we're used to. Alex Stone wrote in The New York Times, "The dominant cost of waiting is an emotional one. Stress, boredom, that nagging sensation that our life is slipping away." That's very different to the waiting of Advent. In Advent, we remind ourselves that we wait in anticipation. Our lives are not slipping away. Rather they move towards a fulfillment. The fulfillment of our own lives, the fulfillment of God's promise, and his new kingdom. We await our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our savior.

It's more like the kind of waiting that a woman might experience in pregnancy. I've never heard anybody say, "Of course I went to the doctor. They told me I was pregnant and nothing's happened." You don't want anything to happen in that circumstance. You want things to run their course, to take time. It's like a gardener if a gardener planted a seed in the garden. They wouldn't go back the next day, look at the ground and say, "Where is it? Nothing happening." Gardeners know that things ripen in the dark, that we need to wait, that everything has a time and a season to come to fruition. Time in those contexts isn't slipping away. It's gathering momentum. Moving towards a climax. Waiting is not always a passive thing. It's not always idle.

Advent waiting, the kind of waiting we train ourselves for in this season, is not passive. It's about staying awake. It's about looking for the signs, being aware of the proximity and the nearness of the coming kingdom. Imagine a scene in an airport. It's late at night. There's two people there. One's gone in because it's cold outside and they're trying to escape the cold. The other person

is there waiting for a loved one they haven't seen for a long time. They're carrying a bunch of flowers. They're looking at the arrivals board. They're pacing up and down and looking at everybody closely who walks past. They are waiting. Well, one person's waiting, the other one's loitering.

In Advent, we're not called to loiter. We're called to wait. Advent waiting is about paying attention, looking for signs, being prepared. When the psalmist says, "My soul in silence waits," that's what he's doing. Being quiet, being sensitive to God's presence in his life, preparing himself to be ready for the king. I read about a speedboat driver once who had a terrible accident. And they were going full throttle on the lake and somehow, they went off at the wrong angle. They hit the wake, and the boat went right up in the air. Of course, the driver was thrown out and he got so disorientated that he hit the water and went down quite a way and realized that he didn't know which way he was facing. So he said he waited till his buoyancy aid pointed him in the right direction, and when he saw which way to go, that's when he started swimming for the surface. What saved that man was that he waited. He waited to see where he needed to put his energies and then swam like fury.

That's Advent waiting. That's the kind of waiting that Peter talks about when he says, "Since all these things will be dissolved in this way, what sort of person ought you to be?" In Advent, we are reminded that we know the end of the story. We know the way that history is going. We know who's going to be there at the end of history to finally establish a kingdom of justice and of peace. We have a perspective from which to stand and examine our own lives and our own values. How do our lives look from the perspective of the coming kingdom? That's a big question which we can't rush to answer. In our Advent reflection, we wait and see and think about our answer to the question of what sort of person we ought to be. Amen.