

**December 3, 2006
First Sunday of Advent (C)**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Jeremiah 33:14-16
Psalm 25:4-5, 8-10, 14
1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2
Luke 21:25-28, 35-36**

We wait and we hope.

We wait for buses and airplanes, friends and doctors. Those who are very time-conscious and impatient (like me) find even short waits almost intolerable – especially in traffic. What keeps me waiting is the hope that something positive may yet happen – that the person in the car ahead of me will turn off, that my waiting will prove to have been worthwhile and that I can move forward with my life.

The other day, I noticed from my kitchen window an elderly gentleman walking on the Commons across the street. He obviously was in no hurry but was taking his time – just walking, hands in his pockets, thinking, looking. It was such a contrast to the purpose-driven pace of others on the sidewalk that day, including me. I usually hoof the one block to the little corner store each morning between six and seven to buy a newspaper. Seldom do I take the time to look – to notice the sunrise – so intent on the next appointment, the next thing to do to get ready for the day. Yet it is precisely that sort of pause, that sort of reflection, that sort of waiting which the season of Advent is designed to encourage – to bid us to take the time, to look, to be present in what we so often take

for granted. Advent slows me down in a good way. Oh sure, there's the helter-skelter of the season, but there are moments – moments of reflection – a sunrise to notice, a savoring of the winter smells of burning fireplaces.

The Scripture readings for the first Sunday of Advent concern the dynamic of waiting and hoping. The prophet Jeremiah was waiting and hoping for an ideal descendant of King David, who might bring security and justice to God's people. Jeremiah was active in the early 6th century B.C. He saw clearly that his people would be defeated by the Babylonians, and that the temple city of Jerusalem would be captured and destroyed. Nevertheless, in the midst of political chaos, Jeremiah remained a person of hope. He was waiting for the Messiah of Israel and was convinced that his waiting would be rewarded. Christians believe that Jeremiah's waiting and hoping were fulfilled in Jesus.

In Advent, this waiting and hoping is trumpeted in a world frightened and fractured by war, poverty, injustice and terrorism. So many people live without hope. It is difficult to believe that anything will change. But hoping and waiting, as expressed in Scripture, is the belief that at some time, what we desire now – deep down inside of us – will actually happen. Hope is different from dreams, which can be momentary and ethereal and forgotten. We do not build our lives on dreams; they are built on hopes. Most of the time, we

cannot even remember our dreams. Hope gives us strength to wait and continue, even when our dreams are shattered. For many of the people of Earth, hoping and waiting is their only food.

Since we need not fear the future because of Jesus Christ, we can look honestly at ourselves and know that God does the same...and loves us precisely where we stand with all of our unloving choices and struggles, our sins and problems. Advent is a good time to make use of our communal reconciliation service, to take place on Thursday, December 14 at 7:30 p.m. at St. James of the Valley Church. That's a week from this coming Thursday. The priests of the three parishes of our cluster will serve as confessors – from St. James, St. Matthias and Our Lady of the Rosary. Do come if you can and savor the gift of hope God invariably gives in this glorious season of Advent.

Let us pray: You save us all, God who is coming! Make me thankful, and confident, and joyful despite the difficulties of life. May my trust in you be a beacon of hope for others, and may I draw strength from the faith of those around me through Christ our Lord. Amen.

We wait and we hope.