

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

A major theme of the Scripture texts for today is waiting. “*Keep yourselves in the love of God,*” Jude wrote, “*WAITING for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*” But how good are you at waiting? I have to admit: I’m not. With the frenetic pace of our lives, it seems to have become more difficult than ever. With our smart devices always at hand, so is the internet with its billions of gigabytes of information just seconds away. The device chimes or buzzes in our pockets and it doesn’t matter whom we’re talking to or whether we’re driving, we can’t wait to see who has summoned us.

We do live in a world that makes waiting difficult—even the less high-tech waiting. We don’t like to wait in line at the grocery store. We seek out the shortest or the quickest one, and if a new register opens up, we rush over to be first in line—no waiting. We don’t like waiting at a red light, for a train crossing the tracks, or traveling behind some slow moving vehicle. Disney recognizes our aversion to waiting, and they are constantly working on ways to shorten the wait time in their theme parks. “*I can’t wait for ...*,” we say all the time, but especially perhaps the kids say “*I can’t wait for my birthday,*” or at this time of the year, “*I can’t wait for Christmas.*” Me? With the snowfall yesterday, I say, “*I can’t wait for summer!*”

Waiting can be difficult, but wait is exactly what our Lord has asked us to do when it comes to His return. But this difficulty can be eased by remembering that we know what the outcome is. Our waiting is not like waiting today for the result of some hospital test where we don’t know—is it cancer or not? We know that the Master shall return; He has promised it. There is no doubt for Jesus is faithful; He cannot lie. He will return in glory to judge the living and the dead, as we confess, and when He does, He will send His angels to gather up the elect of God—those whom the Father chose in Christ Jesus from eternity, whose names have been written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, you and me incorporated into Jesus by Holy Baptism and faith—and He will lead His bride, the Church, to the home of the Bridegroom and to the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb. And there we shall enjoy the bliss of His everlasting presence. We wait now, to be sure, but because we Christians have the sure promise of such a glorious eternity, we are able to endure the waiting that Jesus commands.

Waiting is hard, no doubt, but that difficulty is eased by remembering that we already know the outcome: the heavenly battle is already over. We know who has won. Jesus has won. We don’t have to fight that battle again. Satan has been defeated. Jesus, our Redeemer, has disarmed the “*threatening strong one,*” so that when He comes again, He will break “*down the walls of death’s fortress*” and will

*“bring forth [its] prisoners triumphant, unharmed,”* like Lou whose body we lay in the grave yesterday, and Ruth’s tomorrow. They will wake from their sleep in Jesus and rise from the dead. So will you who believe this good news.

Jesus won, and we yet wait, for having put His house in order, having restored His creation, He went on a journey and left His servants in charge. That is, Jesus ascended into heaven, and left His bride, the Church, on earth to continue His work of calling people to faith in Him. He shall return. The master of the house shall return, but we know not when for *“of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* So we must wait, and while we wait, the master says, *“watch.”*

But that just makes the waiting harder, doesn’t it? That just makes the time go by more slowly. You know the saying, *“A watched pot never boils.”* Of course, you also know the truth is that whether you watch the pot or not, it boils in exactly the same amount of time. It just seems like it will never boil if you watch it. But when you’re busy at the other kitchen tasks, before you know it, you hear the bubbling pot on the stove.

Likewise as we wait and watch, it can seem that Jesus will never return. But just as the pot does boil, so Jesus will come again when that Day arrives. The question is: *“will you be watching or will you be caught unawares? Will He find you sleeping or about the work He has given you to do?”*

For you do have work to do while you are watching. When the master of the house leaves, He puts His servants in charge, and He gives them tasks to do. And He expects the servants faithfully to carry out their given work—we call it vocation. Are you a husband or wife? Are you a mother, father, child? Are you a ruler or citizen? Are you an employer or employee? Are you a pastor or hearer? Whatever you have been called to do in the kingdom of Christ, according to your station, Jesus wants you to be about this, and to do it to the best of your ability. This may change during your life—child to parent to grandparent—but you may never retire from the work that God has called you to do.

And as you faithfully do this work, you are watching while waiting, and I submit, the time speeds by. Moreover, this kind of waiting is not such a dull and drowsy thing. We’re talking about serving your neighbor, and with this kind of waiting, you’ll not be caught sleeping when the master returns.

Still, the waiting is hard, and as we wait, sometimes we may become a little impatient, perhaps even a little bit irritable. Sometimes we may even be a little hard to get along with—some might even say that your pastor is! But this is understandable. Although we have been called out of this world and into the

church through the waters of Holy Baptism where Christ circumcised our hearts and called us to be His own, nevertheless, the old sinful flesh still clings to us. And growing weary of the wait, we can do and say sinful things, even to our brothers and sisters in Christ around us, or we can fail to do what we should. Oh how wretched we are! What are we to do?

We turn to Jesus. That is, while waiting and watching, Jesus says, we are to pray (Mark 14:38). And that's more than just our personal prayer; it's our corporate prayer. Jesus wants us to turn to Him in our every need. Our greatest need, of course, is the forgiveness of our sins, and Jesus came just for that reason. Thus Jesus wants us to turn to Him in repentance; He wants us to confess our sins and hear His absolution. That's why He wants you here at the Divine Service, for here especially you get to hear the words of Christ's forgiveness. Christ says, "*I forgive you,*" so that He may "*present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.*" It's here that you get to hear of the great exchange: Jesus' death for your life. Jesus' blood, the ransom price for your sins. It's here that you hear Jesus say, "*I remember your sins no more,*" and "*As far as East is from the West, this far have I removed your sins from you.*"

So, wait, watch, and pray. Pray now that you may remain faithful: faithful to Jesus alone, faithful to the Name put upon you by water and word, faithful to the Lord's exhortation to "*do this in remembrance of me.*" While waiting and watching, pray. Pray that you may not grow dull or drowsy but be steadfast in the true faith unto life everlasting. Pray, that the Lord would not allow Satan's hordes to tempt you sorely, but that He would strengthen you under your trials. Pray for forgiveness, and having been forgiven, pray that you may also forgive those who sin against you. Pray that the Lord may preserve and extend his Bride, the Church, throughout all the world, that all may see her good works and give glory to the Father in heaven.

Wait, watch, and pray. Pray for the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*" No one knows when that shall be. Therefore pray. Pray that you may watch and wait: wait in the confident hope of everlasting life; wait in the certainty that the blood of Jesus has paid the price for the sins of the world, including yours; wait in dedicated service as the master's servants doing the work He has called you to do; wait in faith, devoting yourselves to your God's gracious gifts. We must wait— "*wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*" And so, while waiting, watch. "*Build yourselves up on your most holy faith.*" And pray: "*pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God.*"

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.