32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
While We Are Waiting, God Is Working
Joshua 24:1-3a, 14–25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Matthew 25:1–13

How are you with waiting?

I suspect most of us don't mind waiting for pleasant things. We can wait for a holiday, a birthday, retirement, or the arrival of a grandchild. But some waiting is very different.

Perhaps one of the hardest places to wait is a hospital waiting room. Time seems to move differently there. We find ourselves glancing at the clock, hoping for news, longing for reassurance. Outwardly, little appears to be happening. Inwardly, everything is happening. Hopes, fears, questions, and prayers come crowding in.

Waiting has a way of revealing what matters most to us.

The truth is that much of life involves waiting. We wait in traffic, we wait for medical results, we wait for important emails, and we wait for significant changes in our lives. And, of course, at present we're waiting for the appointment of a new Vicar.

Waiting can bring anticipation and hope, but also uncertainty, frustration, and weariness. Much depends on what we are waiting for. And I wonder, how do you feel about waiting for the coming of Christ?

For some Christians, that's a major focus. Every generation has produced people convinced that Christ's return is just around the corner. Yet Jesus himself warns us that it's not for us to know the day or the hour.

That uncertainty troubled some members of the church at Thessalonica. They expected Jesus to return within their lifetime. But as believers began to die, anxiety set in. Had those who died somehow missed out?

Paul responds with pastoral wisdom:

> Do not grieve as others do who have no hope.

He doesn't tell them not to grieve. Christians grieve deeply. But we don't grieve as though death has the final word.

Paul's purpose isn't to satisfy curiosity about the end times. It's to strengthen hope. God's future is secure, those who have died in Christ are not forgotten, and death will not have the ultimate word.

The same theme appears in today's Gospel. Jesus tells the story of ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom. Five prepare for a delay; five do not. When the bridegroom finally arrives, the prepared bridesmaids are ready, while the others find themselves excluded from the celebration.

The point isn't that the bridegroom is delayed. The point is readiness.

In the New Testament, the bridegroom is a symbol of Christ. His arrival points to the fulfilment of God's kingdom.

And so we too wait. We wait for Christ's return. We wait to meet Christ at the end of our earthly lives. We wait for answers to prayer, for healing, for guidance, and for strength.

Indeed, waiting lies at the heart of Christian faith. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we proclaim:

> Your coming we await. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

And every time we say the Creed, we affirm:

> He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

What then are we to do with all this waiting?
From a Christian perspective, waiting is never simply marking time. It isn't sitting with folded hands until circumstances improve. Waiting is an active season, shaped by the conviction that God is already at work and that God has promised a future beyond what we can presently see.

Henri Nouwen described "the secret of waiting" as trusting that the seed has already been planted. Something has already begun. Beneath the surface, often beyond our awareness, God is at work bringing new life into being.

I know what it is to grow weary waiting. I know the frustration of seeing little visible progress. Yet the Christian life calls us to remain attentive, trusting that God is present and active even when little seems to be happening.

That, I think, is the wisdom at the heart of both Paul's writing and Matthew's Gospel. Neither is primarily concerned with satisfying our curiosity about the future. Both are concerned with shaping how we live in the present.

Which brings us to Joshua. Standing before a people about to enter a new chapter in their history, Joshua reminds them of God's faithfulness and then issues a challenge:

> Choose this day whom you will serve ... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

That same question confronts us today.

As we await Christ's coming, whom will we serve in the meantime? Will we serve God, or will we give our allegiance to the rival gods of our age: materialism and wealth, self-sufficiency and status, prejudice and self-interest? For waiting is never neutral. The choices we make while we wait shape the people we become.

Waiting is not doing nothing. Nor does God's apparent delay mean that God is absent. God is always at work, often in ways we cannot yet see.
And so, like the wise bridesmaids, we're called to be ready. Not by predicting dates or decoding signs, but by living faithfully. By seeking justice, making peace, caring for creation, serving those in need, welcoming the stranger, and loving the people God places in our path.

In the end, the question is not when Christ will come. The question is whether we will recognise him when he does. That is why Jesus concludes:

"Keep awake."

Stay alert. Pay attention. Watch for signs of grace. Look for what God is doing within you, around you, and through you.

We may sometimes feel as though we're sitting in life's waiting room, longing for answers, healing, direction, or hope. Yet our faith tells us that while we are waiting for God, God is not waiting. God is already at work.

The choices we make while we wait shape the people we become.

And so we wait, not with fear, but with hope; not with folded hands, but with faithful hearts; not simply looking for Christ to come one day, but learning to recognise Christ already among us.

For the risen Christ is not only the one who will come.
He is the one who comes to us now.
He comes in Word and Sacrament.
He comes in the face of our neighbour.
He comes in acts of mercy and justice.
He comes in moments of grace when we least expect him.
And one day, he will come in glory.
Until then, we remain a people of hope.
And so, with Christians in every generation, we pray:

Your coming we await. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Alister Hendery
Taradale – 8.11.2026

.