

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

Our theme today is one of the great Advent themes: waiting. It's a topic of which I have a vast amount of experience. I haven't always been an expert in waiting. Nearly all of my experience has come in the 26 very happy years that I've been married to my lovely wife, Laura.

I've done some simple calculators, just things on the back of an envelope, and I've worked out in the last 26 years, I've spent the equivalent of four months waiting outside women's bathrooms, and another seven months waiting in the car before we go out somewhere. Of course, I'm not alone in this. I don't know who it was that came to this conclusion, but I read this week that Americans spend 37 billion hours a year waiting in line, or queuing, as we like to say in England. And nobody likes it. Richard Larson of MIT concludes 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 Srinivasan, has discovered that on average, we wait just two seconds for a video to upload. After five seconds, the abandonment rate is 25%. And when you get to the enormously long period of ten seconds, half are gone.

So we all need to learn to be patient, as waiting is part of life. And Advent teaches us that waiting is not all bad, contrary to what many people believe. We can learn the value of waiting, so that what Peter says might be true of us. He said in that reading, "While you are waiting for these things, strive to be found at peace."

Are we said to wait in peace? Waiting is an Advent thing, as we're mindful that we live between the times between the now and the not yet. And this becomes very clear in that epistle we heard from Peter. "We're leading lives," he writes, "waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God." That's the great day of the Lord which we thought about last week on Advent Sunday: the day when Christ shall return at the end of time to establish his new Kingdom, and a new Earth.

Three times in that short epistle from Peter, Peter

talks about waiting. We wait for the coming day. We wait for the new heavens and a new Earth. We're waiting for these things, striving to be found at peace. And it's a theme echoed in today's Psalm, the refrain of which was, "My soul in silence waits."

The kind of waiting that Peter and the Psalmist are talking about has a different feel to what 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 one's life is slipping away." That's very different to the waiting of Advent.

We remind ourselves in Advent that we wait in anticipation. Our life is not slipping away; rather, it's moving towards fulfillment. We await our blessed hope, the appearing of the Glory of our Savior. It's more like the waiting experienced by a woman in pregnancy.

I've never heard anybody complain that they went to the doctor, and the doctor said to them, "Well, you're pregnant." I've never heard anyone come back to me and say, "Well, the doctor's told me I'm pregnant, and nothing's happened." You don't want anything to happen in that situation. You want things to run their course. You want things to take time.

The gardeners amongst us knows that you don't plant a seed, and then go back into the garden on the next day and feel resentful that nothing's happened. We know it takes time for a seed to germinate, to come to fruition. Time in those contexts is not slipping away. It's gathering momentum. It's moving towards a climax.

Waiting is not a passive thing. It's not idle. Advent waiting is active. It's about staying awake and alert, looking for the signs of the Coming Kingdom. The Advent message came across strongly to me this week, particularly on Thursday, as the fires took hold. On Wednesday night the fire department sent out an alert, I don't know if you got one, it was rather scary. I was in a restaurant, and my phone went off on alert and so did half the other people in the restaurant. It was sent out by a fire department that was waiting. They were waiting for the fires to come. They knew there were gonna be fires. They were waiting. But the fire department's waiting, do you think it took the form of them just sitting around in their fire

departments with their boots on playing cards? Of course not. The fire department on Wednesday night were out there checking the winds, looking at the weather forecast, seeing if a fire was breaking out anywhere. That was their waiting. It was active, like our Advent waiting.

The fire department were waiting, as we are called to wait. Knowing that something big is brewing on the horizon, knowing it's coming, but not being sure when and where.

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. He's not just twiddling his thumbs. He's paying attention to God's presence, preparing himself to be ready to meet the King.

I heard this week about a speedboat driver who was driving his boat way too fast, maximum speed. He hit a wave, and the boat was tossed right into the air. And of course he came out of the boat and went into the water, and he was so high that he went into the water very deep. And he talked about going into the water, and not knowing which way was up, because he was so turned around. So he said he waited, because he knew that the buoyancy jacket he had on would point him in time which way to go. So he knew which way to expend his energies, to make sure he was swimming to the surface and not just swimming deeper and deeper.

What saved that man was that he waited. He waited to see which way he was facing. He waited to find out where to put his energies. That's Advent waiting. It's the kind of waiting Peter talks about when he asks, "Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of person ought you to be?"

In Advent, we're reminded that we know the end of the story. We know about the Kingdom that will be established at the end of time. We have a perspective from which we can examine our own lives and choices. How do our lives look from the perspective of the coming Kingdom? That's a big question that we can't rush to answer. In our Advent reflection, we wait and see, and think about what sort of persons we ought to be.

Amen.