

Be Alert  
12/3/17

Let me begin with a couple of stories. The first has many variations, which means you may have heard it in some form or another. A while back, some kids were playing out back by the holding pond when they saw a man who they thought might be Jesus. Like me, are you wondering how they knew the man was Jesus? I have no clue but don't let that part of the story deter you from its message. That's for another homily.

Anyway, the kids ran into the church office and excitedly told Denise. She looked out the window and then ran and told Teresa and Bryan. They all ran into Cindy's office and pointed out the window. Cindy then burst into my office, with the rest of the frazzled staff behind her. Cindy shouted out, "Jesus is out back by the holding pond and it looks like he's headed up here to the office! What are we supposed to do?"

I of course did not believe any of them until I looked out the window and saw that this was in fact what may have been happening. Being one who always has everything under control, or at least most of the time, I grabbed my coat and headed out the door. As I left the office area, I turned and shouted, "Quick everyone. Look Busy!"

The second story is actually true and comes to us from Japan. It's about Hachiko, who might be the most faithful dog in the world. Every day he was on hand to see his owner go off to work. Every afternoon at 4 p.m. when the train pulled into the station, Hachiko was there to greet his owner. After some pats and a warm hug, they would walk home together.

One day Hachiko's owner didn't get off the train. He had died at work and never returned. But Hachiko still waited in fervent hope. The next day at 4 p.m., the dog returned to the station to await his master's return.

For the next 10 years, Hachiko never gave up hope. He continued to live with his owner's family and went to the train station every day. When Hachiko died the local townsfolk erected a bronze statue of him and put it at the spot where the dog always waited. The point of that story is similar to the point of Advent: since the beginning, early prophets foretold the coming of a messiah. Just like Hachiko, we still wait for the return of Jesus.

We do a lot of waiting in our lives. We wait for the alarm to remind us it's time to get out of bed. We wait for the coffee to finish, for the shower water to heat up, the traffic to move and on and on. But how much longer do we have to wait for Jesus to come? Well, we all know the timing is up to God. But what else should we take away from this season of waiting?

One author says that God specializes in waiting. And when we wait, we are reminded yet again that God's plan is often different than ours. The author goes on to suggest that God not only waits with us but calls us to watch with Him. A story is told of a mother who witnessed her son fearing the difficulties he would face in his young adult life. He was out of work and his health was not the best due to previous bad choices. She tried to reassure him by lovingly saying, "If you cross a bridge before you get there, you have to cross it twice."

I remember being at the south rim of the Grand Canyon one morning, waiting for the sun to come up. Dave and I were standing there with a couple from California. As the sky brightened, the colors on the north face became brilliant shades of orange and red, changing as the sky grew ever brighter. In our case, the waiting was worth it.

Jesus tells us to be watchful, to be alert. This season of Advent is a good time for us to be alert to the ways we turn our minds and hearts away from God. What distracts us from God's plan for us? Maybe there's someone in our lives who is waiting for us to be a presence in their life. Perhaps the best gift we could give to a loved one or friend is the gift of time. Unwrap that gift early this Advent season.