

“The heart that waits for someone” Matthew 3:1-12 (12/7/25)

We have now come to the second week of Advent. As we shared last week, Advent is the season of waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ. So today, I would like for us to reflect on the theme of waiting.

Have you ever waited for someone with deep longing? As I was preparing this sermon, I asked myself that question. When I thought about it, I realized that while I have waited for Amazon deliveries many times, I could not easily remember a time when I truly waited for a person.

In fact, more often than not, I have been the person going to see others. My parents, my friends, and even my family today have usually been the people waiting for me, especially when I leave for overnight seminars or programs.

As I continued thinking, somewhat humorously, I realized that the time I most earnestly waited for someone was during my officer training, when I waited for my instructor.

At the beginning of training, we learned how to walk like officers, how to stand at attention, and how to carry our bags and hats as officers.

Near the end of this posture training, one morning, the instructor called all the officer candidates to the training ground. About five hundred candidates lined up perfectly and stood at attention according to the instructor’s command. Then, the instructor went into their office. He had gone. At first, we wondered, “Why did the instructor call us here?” “What kind of training is going to start today?” But thirty minutes passed. Then an hour passed. The instructor did not come out.

As time went on, we began to wonder whether we really had to keep standing like this. After about two hours, all we could think about was when the instructor would return. More than anything, we wanted the instructor to come back.

What was interesting was how much my heart kept changing during that time. Standing perfectly at attention for three hours is almost impossible for a human being. Since the instructor was not there, when my body became too exhausted, I would loosen my posture slightly or move a painful part of my body just a little.

When I was moving, I hoped the instructor would not come back yet. But when I was standing in a perfect, proper attention posture, I hoped the instructor would return quickly. That day, we were standing for almost three hours at attention under the hot sun.

Later, the instructor explained that this three-hour attention training was a mental training. It was meant to train officers to obey commands faithfully even when no one was watching.

When we wait for someone with longing, the relationship with that person is important. In the video we watched today, the families waiting for soldiers are overwhelmed with joy and emotion when those soldiers finally appear before them. No one says, “Why are you here?” or “This is not comfortable.” They rejoice because the person they love, the person they have been waiting for, has returned.

But imagine if someone with whom you have a bad relationship suddenly appeared before you. Even if you smile outwardly, your heart would feel uncomfortable. So waiting for someone can be a source of joy or discomfort, depending on the relationship we have with that person.

It is the same when we talk about waiting for Jesus. If our relationship with God is good, waiting for Jesus will be a joy. But if our relationship with God is not good, it becomes difficult to say, “Jesus, please come quickly.”

So what determines whether our relationship with God is good or not? The Bible points to the issue of sin.

In Genesis, after humans fell into sin, Scripture tells us that people hid from God when God called their names. Sin created discomfort in the relationship between God and humans. The main reason our relationship with God becomes bad is the problem of sin. Resolving the problem of sin is the first step in restoring our relationship with God.

So how can we deal with this problem of sin? I believe everyone here already knows the answer. Our sin has already been forgiven through Jesus Christ on the cross.

But here is another question. For some, this truth restores their relationship with God. For others, it does not. They know this truth, but it does not affect their lives. Why is it that the fact that Jesus gave his life on the cross for us sometimes remains only as knowledge and not to transform people's lives? It is because people do not clearly understand repentance. Only when we truly understand repentance can the Salvation of Jesus Christ restore our relationship with God.

Today's Scripture passage is the familiar story of John the Baptist baptizing people. In Methodism and in many Protestant traditions, we do two sacraments: baptism and the holy communion. That is how important baptism is.

Today, baptism is a defining Christian sacrament, but in Jesus' time, Jewish people also practiced baptism as a ritual of purification. They believed baptism made them spiritually clean. That is why many people came to John the Baptist to be baptized.

Scripture even tells us that Pharisees and Sadducees came to him. Though they were opposed to each other, they were the religious leaders of the Jewish people. The Pharisees represented the Law, and the Sadducees represented the Temple. The Law and the Temple were two main aspects of Jewish spiritual life. Those people who represent Jewish people's spiritual lives both came to receive baptism.

When John baptized, his message was this: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” John was born with the mission of preparing the way for the Lord, and his very first proclamation was “Repent.” Repentance, then, is the foundation of baptism.

We often understand repentance simply as turning away from sin—asking for forgiveness and trying not to do wrong again. But in Methodism, John Wesley taught a deeper understanding of repentance.

According to Wesley, repentance is realizing that we cannot save ourselves. It is recognizing that the direction we were running—trying to secure our own safety, comfort, and salvation—was wrong. And more than that, it is realizing that we are now unable to fix it by ourselves. To put it simply, repentance is like someone who swims joyfully far out into the ocean, only to realize they have gone too far, have no strength left, and cannot return without help.

Repentance is realizing, “If I continue like this, I cannot enter God’s kingdom. I will die.” Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Without a heart of repentance, Jesus’ sacrifice no longer feels necessary to us.

Restoring our relationship with God does not begin with solving the sin problem ourselves and then approaching God. Rather, it begins when we turn completely to God and confess, “Lord, I can do nothing.” When we come to God in that way, God resolves the problem of sin. True repentance is not saying, “Lord, I am sorry,” but saying, “Lord, save me.” When we cry out for salvation, God restores our relationship through Jesus Christ and solves our sin problem completely.

As we continue this Advent season, I pray that waiting for Jesus Christ will be filled with excitement and joy for all of us. May waiting for Jesus not be

uncomfortable, but may we welcome Jesus with joy, just like the families in the video we saw today.

For that to happen, we must have the heart of waiting for Jesus, which is repentance. May this be a week in which we recognize that we cannot save ourselves and come before God confessing, “There is nothing I can do.”

When we approach God with repentance, the truth that Jesus Christ already resolved our sin on the cross will come alive to us and transform our lives completely.

Today, the Lord has prepared a sign of that truth for us. To show God’s love—loving us even to death, and waiting for us to return yesterday, today, and tomorrow—God has prepared this Holy Communion. As we receive Communion today, I pray that we experience the grace and love of Jesus Christ, who waited for us before we ever waited for God, and who loved us even to death. As we respond to this invitation to the table, participate with a heart of repentance, and may the sacrifice of Jesus Christ become abundant grace for us. Amen.