Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. We adorn the sanctuary which many people match when they decorate their homes adding lights and decorations, put up trees and wreaths and swags and light candles. Amidst the music and the sounds children making a list for Santa telling the jolly old elf what they want for Christmas. This is the first of four weeks leading to December 25th is a season in the Christian church calendar known as the Advent season. The word ‘advent'' derives from the Latin adventus meaning ''coming.'' Each day we do devotions using one of the preprinted devotions, we increase giving to causes for the less fortunate and some use an advent calendar. This Advent we decorated the building by hanging decorations and putting out the nativity scene as we are going to collect items to help the homeless, adopt a family, place food in a wagon in the front of the sanctuary for the food pantry and come together each Wednesday Night for devotions and music. We also light each of the four candles on a flat wreath with a person lighting a candle with each standing for peace, joy, hope and love and giving a special reading with the fifth candle being lit on Christmas. Each week, we light a new candle that symbolizes a trait one should have to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Here’s the thing. Let’s be honest with one another. While we are looking forward to the first coming of Christ and have images of Mary and Joseph around the rough crib with the shepherds and stable animals while the cattle are lowing we are not there yet. Advent is a season where our preparation is not lineal, not in a straight line. When I watch movies, I like the beginning, middle and an end. I never really cared for flashbacks or flashforwards where the story is interrupted to show what happened 12 days or 12 hours for example. before or after the current scene. Here’s the thing. In Advent, before we get to the first coming of Christ we must go through the second coming of Christ. The end times come before the beginning time of the birth of the Messiah. This takes us out of our comfort zone as we envision surrounding the creche and the comforting scene of Jesus and new parents experiencing the fulfilled promise to us of God’s covenant in the Christ child. Apocalyptic passages make us uncomfortable and perhaps bring fear and worry when we start Advent with this story from Luke talking about the signs in the cosmos of sun, moon and distress amongst nations with roaring of the sea and the waves, with people fainting from fear because they are worried about the immediate future it is understandable why we would feel uncomfortable and worried. We do not know when this will be and it has been a couple millennia, even though we may have worries occasionally about nuclear or environment holocaust, most of us express little day-to-day concern about the end of the world and even less about Jesus’ second coming. These end of time depictions are however not a time to fear but to have a time of joy, knowing the return of Christ is near where all we will have both justice and peace. Instead of terror we can confidently await the coming of Christ. At the same time, we are intimately acquainted as were the people in ancient times with the challenges presented by waiting for an event that seems late in coming. We may be waiting for an event on a national or global scale like economic recovery, ending the war between Israel and Arabic nations, or even concerted international action to get every nation on the same page concerning climate change and solutions. Some of us may be waiting for an event on a personal level like the results from a medical test, a letter, text message or e-mail from an estranged relative, or the safe return of a loved one from a tour of duty. Whatever the case, we know the challenge of waiting, the stress of waiting, the anxiety of waiting.As David Lose wrote in Working Preacher online, while Luke offers us a perspective that does not remove our waiting, it may affect its character. Luke tells we live between the two great poles of God’s intervention in the world: the coming of Christ in the flesh and his triumph over death – so we should not forget that these verses serve as the hinge between Jesus’ teaching and his passion — and the coming of Christ in glory at the end of time and his triumph over all the powers of earth and heaven. We live in this “in-between time,” while causing tension, is nevertheless also characterized by hope of the beginning and the ending of the story of the Church — and therefore of our story which God intervening through Christ. The next couple week we will have to go through John the Baptist, the fashion and diet challenged figure in the wilderness heralding the coming of the one who brings us eternal life exhorting us to repent and then finally Mary and Elizbeth meeting and Mary’s amazing song the magnificent. These all have obedience of people to God. Fortunately for us we are free to struggle, to wait, to serve, to witness — indeed to live and die — with hope because like reading the last chapter in a book we know the end of the story. In our history from Moses to Martin Luther King, Jr., we have many examples of those who, because they had been to the mountaintop, had peered into the promised land, and had heard and believed the promise of a better future, found the challenges of the present not only endurable, but hopeful. We, too, amid the very real setbacks, disappointments, or worries of this life, can stand up and raise head because we have heard Jesus’ promise that our “redemption draws near.” The world may end but the words of God will endure forever.

The reason we spend time contemplating what the Advent season means for us and increasing out time and study during Advent is because we should be alert in the in between times ready for the coming of the end. We should not be caught up in either the excessive pleasures or worries of the day, but rather remain watchful. At the same time, instead of being fearful we should be confident, eager for the events Jesus describes as they signal the approach of our salvation. Indeed, the events Jesus describes will be most worrisome for the “world.” We can do this by focusing on our spiritual life by sharing God’s grace and loving one another, worshipping, praying, doing bible study and devotions and most importantly focusing on serving others. . The coming of the Son of Man will be threatening to the powers that be, but it will bring release from oppression for the followers of Christ. Whatever we hear about the coming end, and no matter what rumors may yet come, we are to remain steadfast in its ministry, trusting that Jesus will provide the necessary words and inspiration so that the discipleship community may witness to the gospel through word, deed, and prayer in all situations. As Jesus says, be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.” We can all preach the gospel and when necessary, use words. I am hoping you have a meaningful Advent journey. Amen.