

Promise

“It’s time to wait.”

Jeremiah 33:14-16

First in the Advent series, “Wishin’ and Hopin’”

A sermon presented as a children’s message

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Peeking

There was once a time when I was young just like the children who sit on the steps in front of the sanctuary. I was once the same size as some of them and was once filled with the same wonder children have when they start seeing decorations hung: signs that Christmas is around the corner.

Like them, I made my lists, at least in my heart – there were presents I really wanted to have. One year it was a Steve Canyon jet pilot’s helmet. Another year it was a scooter. And still another year, when I was advancing in my years and was just about to become a teenager, I wanted to a guitar. When you get to be 13, it seems your attention gets directed to things that you and your friends all want. We had started paying attention to music and, like many of my friends, I could imagine myself playing music and singing like a rock star. My friends all wanted guitars. I really wanted a guitar. So that is what I asked for.

The days drew near to Christmas, and this year I was feeling even more excited about it than I ever had been before. Were my parents going to give me what I asked for? Was I ever going to get a chance to strum its strings and make music and sing? The more I wondered about these questions and thought about the answers to them, the more excited I got. In fact, I got so excited I started doing what I had always known I wasn’t supposed to do.

I started looking. I was old enough to be left at home alone sometimes; and other times since my sister was older, we didn’t need a baby sitter if my parents had stepped out. So, filled with so much excitement, I took those times to begin a search. I thought I couldn’t wait. I looked under my parents’ bed in their bedroom. I searched in my dad’s photo dark room that had become stuffed with all kinds of old furniture and boxes of

things that he could no longer use it for developing pictures. I looked in the closets downstairs.

Then I looked in a large closet upstairs. I opened the door and, seeing nothing in the space just inside that was empty, I reached through some of the long coats that were hanging on the first rack; and that's when my fingers touched something that was cardboard and tall like a box. I stopped. Then I reached in again and took hold of it. With both hands I took it out. It was indeed a tall box that was narrower at the top than it was at the bottom.

I just looked at the box. I knew what must be inside. At first I was afraid to open it. I knew I wasn't supposed to. My heart just raced. It leapt like a deer. And I smiled. Then I put it away because I knew it wasn't mine. Not yet.

I put it back.

Don't do that because I did. Don't try to find your presents and peek before you get them. It spoils the surprise that you're supposed to have when you open them and see how thoughtful your parents are, or your brothers or sisters or grandparents. It's not ok to look.

But it is ok to be excited, to look ahead and imagine what it would be like if your dreams came true. It is ok to hope, especially when you've been given a promise about something you want very much. And, this is the part that I had a hard time with especially that year: it is ok to wait. In fact, when it's something that is good and true, waiting for it and filled with hoping is just what you're supposed to do.

Empty Manger

The people of Israel had been hoping for a Savior for a long time. They were very hurt. Many of them were very hungry and poor. They did not have freedom and they did not know how God loved them.

They needed God to send them someone who would tell them that they were forgiven for the things that they and their ancestors did that were wrong. They needed someone who would give them God's love and help them to be the kind of people they were supposed to be. They needed someone who would show them the way to get along and be free. They needed someone who would make wars stop and bring peace.

That's when the voices of prophets began speaking for God. They said that God promised that someone would come that would make these things happen. Prophets like Jeremiah told them that there would be a time that God's promise would be fulfilled. A king would come who would bring justice and peace. The people would be saved and would live in God's safety.

This was God's promise. Because God promised, that's the first time that people started waiting for Christmas. And they waited for a long time: in fact, hundreds of years.

Part of our decorations this time of year might include an empty manger. We know why the manger is there, because we already know the story, how Jesus was born and how the angels sang and the shepherds came to see him. It's like we already peeked. And this time, it's ok, because we know that Jesus is the one who has come to be the person that God promised.

But for now, it's empty. Because Christmas is not yet, there are weeks to go before it happens; and we can remember the time that people had to wait so much longer than that. So, these are the weeks for getting ready, and for waiting, and remembering that we still really need him.

Waiting, Yet Having Peeked

When Christmas came the year of my guitar I couldn't wait to open that package that was bigger on the bottom than it was on the top. I found the box now wrapped in paper and tied with a bow: it was propped against the wall next to the Christmas tree. And then I opened it. Slowly. And I took it out. I remember how it felt in my hands and how the strings felt stiff and hard and how it sounded when I first strummed my thumb across them. I even remember how it smelled – like fresh wood that's just been cut, and new like a fresh coat of lacquer.

I played it, learned some chords the first day; and I sang.

That's what we look forward to doing with Jesus. That's what we are waiting for and hoping: once again to hold him in our hearts. And it's going to be soon that we will sing.