Advent Midweek 4

Waiting with Worship

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

Sermon Outline

 2. Having to wait with worship can be among the greatest disappointments.

 1. But in our disappointments, God gives us what is true worship, to speak back to him.

Here Is the True—and Never Disappointing!—Worship We Wait for God to Give Us.

Sermon

Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.” (vv 1–3)

It has been twenty-seven days since Black Friday, when businesses opened their doors to enthusiastic shoppers seeking early bargains on Christmas gifts. In many places, Christmas commercials and music began filling the airwaves in early November. So here we are tonight, four days before Christmas and three days before our Christmas Eve services. Consider for a moment the array of Christmas images that fill the minds of Americans—young and old—from animated films such as Spielberg’s magical *Polar Express* and Disney’s *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, to family comedies to the classic *It’s a Wonderful Life* with Jimmy Stewart to a host of touching Hallmark Christmas specials. Christmas in America is filled with jolly images of mythical elves, flying reindeer, sleighs, and sleigh bells amid quaint New England towns and picturesque countryside. There is certainly nothing wrong with enjoying such movies; many of them extol Christian virtues and actions such as forgiveness, reconciliation, charity, love, and traditional “family values.”

The point, dear friends in Christ, is that amid the last-minute Christmas hubbub, you have chosen to take time out and join a small group of worshipers before our Lord’s altar in this quiet, sacred place. It has been twenty-four days since the First Sunday in Advent, when we began our preparation for the celebration of the festival of the holy incarnation. With just four days to go, we have gathered to hear a remarkable old story that will prepare us to observe properly the festival day with profound joy and gladness.

On Christmas Day, we will return to the Lord’s house to worship Christ, the newborn King. You will not hear tonight’s Old Testament story on the radio, see it on television, or read it in newspapers and magazines. It is a true story that took place nearly three thousand years ago. It is a poignant story about King David, his pastor Nathan, and the king’s deep and genuine desire to give the Lord God the very best in worship. It is a story that looks forward to and anticipates the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth, life, death, and resurrection bring enduring and eternal peace to this fallen world. So tonight, dear children of God, we do not have images of candy canes and visions of sugarplums dancing in our heads, but images of King David—a pious king with a desire to build the Lord a temple befitting the worship he deserves from his people Israel.

2.

Seven and a half years after being anointed king of Israel in Hebron, David defeated the Jebusites and made Jerusalem his new capital. How does one go about transforming a Canaanite city into the heart and soul of a nation that consists of twelve contentious tribes? How does one cleanse a city that has been defiled by Baalism—a polytheistic abomination of cultic prostitution and idolatry? How? With the true worship. You do what David did. You bring in the big guns! You bring in the ark of the covenant and cleanse the sin and idolatry of that place with the name and presence of the Lord God of hosts.

Every pastor has experienced times of deep disappointment as he strives faithfully and conscientiously to carry out the responsibilities of his office. Most pastors can relate to the story told by an experienced pastor about his days as a young pastor fresh out of the seminary. The pastor explains: “One of the biggest disappointments in my life occurred at my first parish when the voters assembly decided not to replace the old worn-out electronic organ with a beautiful new pipe organ, but simply another inferior electronic organ. It was devastating! I was so distraught I could hardly chant the liturgy at the next service. But I got over it. I got over it, but not without the wise counsel of a fellow pastor. As I poured out my frustration over the phone, he listened and sympathized, but then he added, ‘Just remember, the people in your congregation will remember you more for how you react to disappointment than for how you react to success.’ ”

One day, King David looked out of the window of his new palace in Jerusalem and was struck by the fact that while he lived in luxury, the Lord still dwelt in a humble tabernacle. This was a theological issue, so David talked to the prophet Nathan, his spiritual confidant, pastor, and father confessor. “The king said to Nathan the prophet, ‘See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.’ And Nathan said to the king, ‘Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you’ ” (vv 2–3). King David was a builder. He built an army, a kingdom, a city, and a palace. He was also a gifted composer and musician.

 Anyone who has been privileged to be involved in the building of a new church knows the joy, excitement, and anticipation of being involved in such a worthy undertaking. What a night! One can easily imagine David, too excited to sleep, busily working out plans for the new temple. But that same night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan, instructing him to tell King David that he was not permitted to build the temple.

One of the greatest disappointments in King David’s remarkable life was to be told by God, not by a voters assembly, but by God himself, that he would not have the privilege of building the temple. David, whose liturgical compositions are still sung in the Church today, must have been devastated. Through the prophet Nathan, God told David: “I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. . . . I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you” (vv 6, 8–9).

1.

Then the Lord told David what he would do for him in the future: “And I will make for you a great name. I will give you rest from all your enemies. You will not make a house for me, but I will make a house for you—a house which will last forever. I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him. Your throne shall be established forever” (adapted from 2 Sam 7:9–16).

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child” (Lk 2:4–5). The Lord’s promise of an eternal kingdom and steadfast love would ultimately be fulfilled in this Child of Mary, who bore the iniquity of us all and in our stead was disciplined with the rod of men and crucified.

So what did David do on hearing these words? He went back to that humble tent in which dwelt the ark of the covenant. He sat down before the Lord and prayed a beautiful prayer that was both a prayer of thanksgiving and a confession of faith. Remarkably, the contents of David’s prayer (in 7:18–29) are almost identical to what God told the prophet Nathan. Thus, David simply said back to God what God had just said to him through Nathan.

David thanked God for being with him thus far in his life as king. He thanked God for redeeming his people Israel from Egypt and its gods with the promise that they would be his people forever. He thanked God for promising to establish an eternal house for David. On the basis of God’s words, David found the courage and strength to conclude his prayer by asking the Lord to bless him and his house so that it might continue in God’s presence forever.

We remember King David for many things. But on this day, we remember him for how he responded to the disappointment of being denied the right to build a beautiful temple worthy of the divine service of the one true Lord God of hosts. He sat down before the ark of the covenant in which had been placed the Ten Commandments and a jar of manna, and he prayed. Looking at himself in humility and amazement, he accepted God’s promise that somehow from his sinful flesh would come an eternal kingdom in which the Lord’s “steadfast love would never depart.” Before him was the ark and the manna of which Jesus spoke when he said: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51).

So here you sit before the Lord’s altar. Like King David, you have come before the Lord, bringing your litany of disappointments, worries, sorrows, regrets, sin, and guilt, mixed with a litany of joys and blessings received. Here you sit in God’s house, where his Word and Spirit give you the courage and strength to pray, give thanks, confess the faith, and ask the Lord God to bless you, your family, and his Church so we may dwell in his presence forever.

In our Advent and Christmas worship, like David, we will say back to God what he has revealed to us through his saving deeds and Word. In creed, prayers, hymns, and canticles, we confess and praise God for sending his Son to live, die, and rise again to atone for our sins and give us eternal life.

As our society becomes increasingly secular and pagan, we join David in the Lord’s presence before his altar. Black Friday is long past. Advent purple and blue with its time for preparation, repentance, and joyful anticipation will soon give way to a truly white Christmas, when white paraments will decorate our altar. White, because it is a Christological celebration of our divine and holy Savior, who brings to us his righteousness, holiness, and life eternal. The promise will be fulfilled. It will not disappoint us.

Here Is the True—and Never Disappointing!—
Worship We Wait for God to Give Us.

From Christmas, we look forward to a dark day on which the infant whose birth we celebrate will shed his blood and die for the sins of the world. On that day, altars will either be stripped of all paraments or clothed in black. But we do not call it Black Friday; we call it Good Friday, and for good reason. No, it will not disappoint us. Yes, let us fill our minds with such images. Rejoice and be glad!