

I wish to discuss the tension we all live with – a reality we can't ignore. Today begins the season of Advent, a time of waiting. But we don't like to wait. Each year Advent comes as a gift to remind us that people waited thousands of years for the first Christmas, and their wait is important because they were faithful for something they would not even see.

On the other hand our culture despises waiting and we are encouraged to get what we want, when we want it. Anything we feel we deserve is a right, and if it is my right, I deserve it now! Even Advent seems archaic, for we want to sing Christmas songs, and open presents now! But sometimes we are reminded that anything worth having is worth waiting for. Oh, I agree, if I can have it now, I'll take it ... but when did waiting become a crime and why not wait so that the gifts we do embrace are appreciated and celebrated as they gifts they are?

I have always found waiting to be a difficult task. It often seems like such a waste of time. If I know what I want, why wait? It is also frustrating when I am not sure how the wait will end. Waiting can emphasize every fear and worry. *When I want something "now," what reason is there to wait?*

From day one, that has been the siren call of the world. Why wait? In fact, how many stories of scripture emphasize that disastrous life style? Adam and Eve couldn't wait to be more like God. And taking matters into their own hands they refused to wait and took what they wanted. In doing so, their eyes were opened to the reality that they had run away from God, and Paradise was lost. And they could never go back.

Cain couldn't wait to sacrifice like Abel. He was impulsive, used to getting what he wanted, when he wanted it. Abel was a farmer and understood patience. Cain was a hunter, and when he wanted to hunt, he couldn't wait. In his selfishness to have his own way, he lost his brother. Noah's neighbors were too busy being busy. They ridiculed his faith in an unseen God and in doing so literally "missed the boat."

Israel couldn't wait for Moses to get off Sinai. Their impulsiveness took over and because they couldn't see the God on the mountain, they built an idol of gold so they could see and control the object of their prayer. In such a failure to wait, they were condemned to wait a lifetime before they could leave the desert.

David couldn't wait to have Bathsheba for a wife. But she was married to David's top general. David sent him off to a battle he knew would result in his death, and presto, David found a way to have his forbidden fruit.

Jesus' disciples didn't like waiting either. Judas wanted Jesus to lead an Army against Rome. Because he ran out of patience and didn't see any way he would receive the profits of war, he got his silver another way by selling Jesus and betraying him in the garden.

Peter couldn't wait for Jesus and was afraid that if things didn't turn out right he might be dragged into the same trial Jesus faced. So he denied him three times, insisted he was not a disciple, because he couldn't wait to see how Jesus might possibly get out of the mess he was in.

Sometimes waiting is hard, but not waiting creates more problems than solutions. Life is confusing when sin sets the tone. *We wait when we should act and get impatient when waiting is called for.* All of this brokenness is called sin.

But as angels announced at Bethlehem, the old wait had ended and finally a Messiah was on the scene. But a different waiting would follow. Jesus disciples wanted the kingdom "NOW!" But Jesus said, "Just wait ... You haven't even seen the good stuff yet!"

The religious and political leaders couldn't wait to get Jesus out of town. But Jesus said, "Just wait ... it will only be three days and your selfish impatience will be turned around. Calvary appeared to have the upper hand, but from the cross Jesus cried out "It is finished ... the wait is over!" And Easter then showed what he meant as the darkest, most fearful wait of all became the beginning of an eternity in the joy of God's love.

At the empty tomb, angels announced the wait at death's door is over too. But now a different kind of "faithful" waiting would begin.

Advent is a gift to help us learn that "faithful waiting." The texts and hymns of this season are like bells and whistles saying, "Take time to WAIT."

We remember centuries of waiting. We celebrate a wait that ended in a manger. We learn to wait in faith for the day and days to come! We remember the darkness without Christ! We celebrate the Light that is Christ! We learn to live in the light for whatever tomorrow might bring.

Life now becomes the faithful gift of joy-filled waiting ... and this waiting is so different from the world's because it is not wrapped around "me" but instead is driven by God's grace wrapping itself around me.

One of Advent's great lessons is that faithful waiting is part of "the cure."

Every night when we go to sleep, we get practice in waiting. In the darkness of sleep, when I cannot fear or worry or control, I am waiting for the dawn of a new day. And that wait refreshes me and prepares me for what hasn't yet come to pass. St. Paul used that image in his letter to the Romans when he said, "*you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.*" ¹² *The night is far gone; the day is at hand.*" (Rom. 13:11b-12a)

Advent is like a reminder of the nighttime and darkness of sleep, it is waiting for the dawn of a new day, the gift of a Light to the Nations that is more important than anything I can fear or create. It is in waiting that we more clearly see what God is doing, and prepare ourselves to respond with appropriate joy.

When I am not center (my needs, timetable, desires) I can hear God. When I hear God I remember that often my first desire isn't best for me or God or for those around me. Faithful waiting is like looking at the world through a new set of lenses and everything is changed by a new perspective and a new hope. Over the years we learn the virtue of waiting; in the right way; for the right time. I still fight it (as do we all) but faith is God's gift of helping us to wait.

My grandfather was a missionary in Philippines. On an island hopping trip he was about to board plane in Manila, but asked to wait. Another traveler was in a great hurry, couldn't wait, and my grandfather was asked if he would wait for another flight. He also was anxious for his destination but said he would wait.

The impatient man boarded that plane, and none reached their destination. My grandfather's willingness to wait allowed him to reach his ... and so it is with us!

Waiting is being quiet ... and listening to God instead of just me.

Waiting is being honest ... reflecting on my world and God's love.

Waiting is being faithful ... in Bible study, in prayer, in servant love.

Surrounded by a world that does not want to wait ... again, we wait ... just as God's love has always waited for you and for me.

And when faithful waiting is over (well you know what comes next) ... just as there is a time for waiting, there also is a time for waiting to end and living to begin. And our response is to "go in peace" and "love as Jesus

first loved me.” Advent reminds us that “faithful waiting” does have its reward! Amen.

[T. W. Seeber]