

Think of all the waiting we must do. I mention "waiting" because Advent is all about waiting. Waiting is hard for us for one of two reasons: Either we are too eager (like a kid before Christmas) or we are too busy (just look at your schedule.) How often are you too eager or busy to wait? And isn't waiting only easy when something is coming that we would rather put off?

I mention waiting, because Advent is a season of waiting, but for most, Advent waiting is not a popular sport or a first choice. So, are you eager or too busy for Christmas; and what would it take for you to enjoy the wait? John the Baptist spent most of his life waiting. He waited for year after year in the desert, preparing, praying, listening, until finally his brief time in the spotlight had come. And John's message was for his congregation to learn how to wait. His message was simple – "repent" so you don't miss the Messiah"

"Repentance" means "a change of mind" (a time out or intentional reboot.) John had learned in the silence of the desert how important that was – how patience, silence, straining to hear God, waiting was a new way to live. He wanted his people to give up their old way of living and learn to see things in a new way ... he wanted them to give up passive waiting, or just killing time, and instead watch the horizon so they would be ready to embrace God's love in the flesh.

It is only such a holy time out, like John's years in the desert that we can escape our busyness or our fears and learn to see things in a new way." Such waiting ties us to the God who waited for the right time to bring a baby in a manger. Such waiting turns us from old habits, fears, and memories and helps faithful people to enthusiastically watch for that new creation.

For John's people to walk to the Jordan meant to leave their old lives behind, if only for a few hours, walking away from distractions and anxiety, from responsibilities and concerns just long enough to see the light of a new dawn.

John's people were no different than kids before Christmas, wanting a Messiah NOW and "gift wrapped" just as they expected he would be. And some were too busy and feared that Messiah just might change their comfortable lives. But John got their attention, and many did not miss the boat! But it was important for them to "repent," to change directions, to pause and take a time out! To wait!

Of course, it was difficult to wait when flocks needed tending, and daily trips were needed from the well or to the market. It was difficult when children's sandals were lost, Rome was waiting on the next tax payment, and there was fear of leprosy, hunger, famine, and death. Who could wait with such distraction? Who could wait when there were so many other pressing needs? And yet without that waiting what a great disappointment would have followed?

Now it is our turn. For an Advent wait. For our own repentance. For patience. For standing at the edge of the desert so we don't miss a new day! So, what do we

fear? What keeps us from slowing down? Are we able to take a few weeks and learn how to wait? Or will we pass up the repentant waiting Advent is all about?

In his book, "The Hungering Dark," Fred Buechner writes "*the world is full of people who in one way or another are by and large merely "getting through their lives, who are killing their time, who are living so much on the surface of things and are so bad at hearing each other and seeing each other that it is little wonder that one life seems enough to them, or more than enough.*"¹ And yet without repentant waiting, Jesus will not be the reason for the season!

Certainly, it is difficult to wait with so much preparing left to do. So much distraction with taxes and bills that will come after our holiday splurge. Repent? I don't feel guilty, especially when I look at people who aren't even close to believing or knowing that Christ really is the first word in Christmas! Wait? Why not gifts now? Wait? I am sorry, but I am just too busy!

This wait is called ADVENT, which means "coming into." This is our time to wait and remember HOW God's love came into our world and our hearts. Advent is our time to pretend we have journeyed to the edge of the desert and look at the waters of life to see how God comes splashing our way! This repentant waiting offers us the "time out" we need to see things in a new light, from a new perspective, and with hearts that receive rather than try to control faith!

Life gets so complicated we "see the trees but miss the forest." Or we are so eager we start running through the forest and fail to see each tree! John's cry of REPENT means turn around. Look at something new. REPENT means stop doing what you have been up to and see what God is doing for you.

Later in that same book, Buechner talked about a class he had to teach one late afternoon in the winter. He walked into a bright, noisy classroom and suddenly thought about the sunset going on out in the dusk of winter. He writes, "On impulse I turned off the lights. The room faced west and so it went dark, everything disappeared except what we could see through the window, and there it was – the entire sky was on fire by then, like the end of the world or the beginning of time. You might think that somebody would have said something ... but the astonishing thing was that the silence as complete as you can get it in a room full of people, and we sat there unmoving for as long as it took the extraordinary spectacle to fade slowly away. For over twenty minutes nobody spoke a word...And it is no immodesty to say that it was a great class because my only contribution was to snap off the lights and then hold my tongue. What was great was the unbusy-ness of it!"²

Too busy to wait? John turned off the lights so everyone would be facing the same way when the Messiah came riding into town, and for us, Advent is that same

¹ The Hungering Dark. Fred Beuchner. Page 73

² Ibid. Pages 74-75

repentant turnaround that gives time back to God if only for a little while. Don't you think God was impatient for that first Christmas and yet He waited until the time was just right? Don't you think Jesus was anxious to get the cross out of the way and yet we endured all that he endured out of his passionate love for us? How difficult it must have been to experience the darkness of death, and yet that wait in the tomb became the Advent that turned into Easter!

Wouldn't you prefer a pilot to wait for traffic to clear before landing on a crowded runway? Or a parent to wait so that anger doesn't get in the way of loving discipline? That is what John learned to do in the desert, as he gave up his entire life for a brief moment of introducing a Messiah to a confused crowd. And John's cry to REPENT is an echo across the ages, that bounces off mountains and memories and calls us to turn out the lights, step into the desert, become patient and less busy and prepare to celebrate what God's love changes in our world and in our lives.

In this season that we make so busy, take time for a faith-filled WAIT so that you can repent (turn around) and open eyes, heart, love to real gift that awaits YOU. We have had the imagery all wrong! CHRISTMAS isn't about GIVING -- it is about celebrating that WAITING is over. And unless we wait, in the spirit of John's "repent" we will miss the real Gift, which enables us to know how we will now celebrate and give in return.

Indeed! It is worth waiting for! Amen

[TWSeeber]