

“Waiting Game”¹

Thanksgiving Day is past and the lethargy from our over indulgence that too accompanies it. Black Friday is also behind us and the overwhelming letdown that hyper consumerism engenders. We have also survived Small Business Saturday. Perhaps the waning of these will allow us to settle into a peaceful Advent.

Yet every year there comes the shock of the scriptures for the first Sunday of Advent. These scriptures are not about a little baby in a manger and barn animals, an expectant mother, the Angel Gabriel, or snow. The first Sunday of Advent is a shock to me because it is not about the first coming of Christ but the second coming. It is about ominous signs in the heavens. It is about Christ coming again in power, and glory, and judgment. So much for “Away in the Manger” and “First Noël.”

Advent is a season of waiting. We wait with expectation for the coming of Jesus as our savior. We also wait for Jesus’ second coming that ushers in the Day of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord is a prophetic tradition in Judaism that foretells the day when God will set everything right in the world. It was originally a day to look forward to when Israel, as God’s chosen people, would be free of oppression and its enemies vanquished. Later prophets forecast The Day of the Lord as a day of woe because Israel, despite its status, had disobeyed YHWH and worshipped other gods. The imagery that Jesus calls on in this passage is from that tradition.

If we were apocalyptically inclined, we might well think that this year has been leading up to the Day of the Lord. We have hunkered down for eight months as we are waiting out a pandemic. The advocates for Black Lives Matter movement have waited for years for their civil rights to be fully recognized. We have lived through a tumultuous election cycle and now await the changes that the transition will bring. This year has involved a lot of waiting and now it is Advent the season of waiting and expectancy.

Whether we are Israelites waiting on the Day of the Lord, modern people waiting out medical, social and political change or a pregnant girl in Nazareth awaiting the birth of her first born child waiting can be hard. Waiting can be hard. When will the Lord come in judgment? When will there be a vaccine? When will there be true racial equality? Perhaps Isaiah said it best at the beginning of today’s reading “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.”²

As much as we may want God to tear open the heavens, it is well we should learn or relearn how to be patient. Americans have become so used to

¹ Thanks to Swing Out Sister for the loan of the song title.

² Isaiah 64:1 NRSV

instant gratification. Think of it. First there was Amazon, then Amazon two-day, then Amazon Prime Next Day, then Amazon same day. What's next Amazon Before?³ Amazon will know before we do what we want and deliver it to our doors just as we realize that we want it? I think we need to cultivate a little patience, and Advent can do that.

As we enter Advent let us all take the opportunity to be still. Let the calm and beauty of the season wash over us. Relish the change in the light; the early coming of night and the slow arrival of dawn. If you cannot save putting up the Christmas tree for a few more weeks, then savor evenings by the light of the tree and leave the presents for later. Light the Advent candles week by week and wait. Let's enjoy the possibility of slowing down for a while.

In slowing down we have the opportunity to find our way back to God. It is God who waits with us in trying times. It is God who is sitting in the corner waiting to be recognized and allowed into our hearts. It is God who can provide the comfort we so long for when the TV, Amazon, alcohol, drugs, and other human devised sedatives do not work anymore.

In the book *The Spiritual Child*,⁴ psychologist and author Lisa Miller cites a number of studies about harbingers of success for a college student. You might think it is SAT scores, class ranking, prep school versus public school, or financial security. Yet the top three are getting eight hours of sleep, eating a healthy breakfast, and a spiritual life. If those three practices are what foretell success for college students going through one of the most stressful periods of life, think about how important it is for all of us.

Our spiritual life matters. Take the opportunity now while you are hunkered down to get back in touch with God. If you feel you are already in touch, then strengthen your spiritual life. It can be as simple as a time of silence, adding a few minutes of prayer time, reading the daily lessons as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer or Forward Day by Day, a walk in the woods, listening to Bach, reading poetry, almost anything that allows you to step back from being busy and rushed and being still with God.

Perhaps you think you have had enough of the quiet and the slow pace, but for the last eight months whatever we have experienced has been tainted by anxiety about what is going on in the world around us. Now is the time to let that go. Let Advent be the excuse you need to just let it be. When we can do that we have the opportunity to live into the meaning of Advent, and the meaning is in the waiting.⁵

³ My riff on a comedy routine by Ronny Chieng

⁴ Lisa Miller, *The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving*. [New York: St. Martin's, 2015]

⁵ From the poem "Kneeling" by R.S. Thomas