

Waiting with Hope



Do you look forward to Christmas? It is a season that begins with hope as we wait for the unexpected. The question is how do we wait? Do we just sit passively and wait? Or do we do something to demonstrate our faith and hope and waiting?

I remember being at a bus stop on a cold and rainy day. I shared the shelter with a woman, who was obviously in a hurry. She anxiously paced up and down and walked regularly out onto the street to see if the bus was coming yet. After several minutes of this, her cell phone rang. In an agitated voice she responded to the obvious question saying, *I'm at the bus stop waiting for the bus*. And then, in obvious response to the demands of her caller to hurry up.... she said, *I'm waiting as fast as I can!* In a sense that is the kind of waiting we are doing for the coming of God in the Christ-child. We are trying to hurry up our waiting.

Waiting is foreign to our society. It seems unnatural. We hunger for immediate gratification. The idea of delayed satisfaction is a stranger to our thinking.

The symbols of our unwillingness to wait are all around us. Fast food chains boom because we don't have time to eat. We stand in crooked lines, then yell out an order, wolf it down in five minutes and then get back to the rat race. We haven't got time to sit down and read a book anymore.

I, like you, accept most of our no-wait approach to life. But the truth is that though we do not like waiting, waiting is a part of living. We must wait for payday, a break, quitting time, and for the mailman. When you do your Christmas shopping, you had certainly better be prepared to wait in a line to get checked out, or wait to get a parking place. But there are also very serious matters for which we wait. Some wait for health to return, some for the coming of the welfare check, some for marriage or remarriage, or even divorce. A scared child waits for the coming of morning, and a scared adult awaits death. And an expectant mother waits for her new baby to be born. Waiting can be pure agony.

The problem is that scripture time and time again tells us that God's clock is wound in a

different way. Time is different to God. We look at seconds; God looks at the ages. Waiting, not hurrying is one of God's characteristics. And God tells humanity that they too must wait with hope for the new day to dawn. And that is where the story of Christmas really begins. It begins thousands of years before the birth of Christ. The people longed for that one who would bring light out of darkness, and make the blind to see. They longed for the coming of the One who would turn their sorrow into joy, and vanquish their enemies. Waiting and longing in hope for the coming of God is a very old practice for people of faith. And while we hurry our waiting, we are called to wake up, to keep watch, to pay attention to what is going on so that we don't miss the moment when the unexpected happens!

There is an amusing Hasidic story about a rabbi who crossed a village square every morning on his way to the temple to pray. One morning, a large Russian Cossack soldier, who happened to be in a vile mood, accosted him, saying, "Hey, rabbi, where are you going?" The rabbi simply said, "I don't know." This infuriated the soldier. "What do you mean, you don't know, every morning for twenty-five years you have crossed the village square and gone to the temple to pray. Don't fool with me. Why are you telling me you don't know?" He grabbed the old rabbi by the coat and dragged him off to jail. Just as the Cossack was about to push him into the cell, the rabbi turned to him, and softly said, "You see, I didn't know."

In Advent, we are called to be alert to the coming of Jesus the Christ, to be alert to the real world and all that is occurring so that we can live lives worthy of our calling - in hope that we are ready and do not miss our moment when Christ touches us in a new way and reveals to us his hope for us in the coming days. And when he comes he will touch us! Think of how, every day each of us experiences a few little moments that have just a bit more resonance than other moments: we hear a word that sticks in our mind; or maybe we have a small experience that pulls us out of ourselves, if only briefly; we share a hospital elevator with parents who hold their new baby, their faces filled with hopes and dreams; a stranger on the street smiles or nods their head as if to say hello; a small child starts a conversation with us at McDonalds; we watch the anxiety on a child's face as they prepare to meet Santa.

And if we were to collect these small moments in a notebook and save them over a period of months we would see certain trends emerge from our collection, certain voices would emerge that have been trying to speak through us. We would realize that we have been having another life altogether, one we didn't even know was going on inside us. And maybe this other life is more important than the one we think of as being real, this clunky day-to-day world of furniture and noise and metal. So just maybe it is these small silent moments that are the true story-making events of our lives. Advent is a season for watching and waiting - of being open so that God can appear to us, meeting us at this table and touching us in a way that enables us to go forward in hope, in peace, in joy and love. God had called you to this place by name, the waiting is over, come for all is ready. Amen.



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Mark 13:32-37
November 30, 200