

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 30th 2014

If one of us were to calculate a life's time of waiting— I can't imagine what that would be. Just the thought of it is overwhelming, tiring. Time - waiting 'for' something, someone. Time that could be better spent. Waiting, the time in between what is now and what is to come.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent: the Waiting Time between Ordinary Time and Christmas Time.

In today's reading from Isaiah we hear longing and heartfelt pleading for Yahweh to return to his people. A people lost, estranged and abandoned: "Why do you let us wander...Return for the sake of your servants". A people feeling punished: "...you are angry, and we are sinful...unclean people, withered like leaves....and guilt(y)." A people yearning, confused, in pain and misery, lost without their God. A people in wait. A people lost in time. They cry, "Let us see your face".

In the second reading from 1 Corinthians, we hear a thankful, hopeful voice, an encouraging and affirming voice. "I give thanks to my God ...for the grace...bestowed on you in Christ Jesus... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait..." Paul is saying in the waiting the consolations of God, peace and goodness, kindness and mercy, hope, trust and courage are being given. "God is faithful, and you were (are) called to fellowship..."

In Marks' gospel we hear a more encouraging, yet cautionary tone. "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time has come." But, be assured the time will come, is coming. 'Watch!' God is coming, when is the question. The anxiety and pain of Isaiah is not here. There is confidence, trust that at some time there will be an end to the waiting. Wait. Sometime, Something, Someone will come.

How am I to be in the waiting? I experience anticipation, expectation, excitement, longing, frustration, impatience, desire, emptiness and loneliness, hunger. I want whatever it is now. I don't like to wait.

Waiting is about time. Waiting is focused on the future, not a backward look or even a glance into the past. A looking forward to a new, different time, a new experience. Something is coming – good or bad, it is coming.

The Church teaches that Advent is a time of waiting, anticipation, expectation, joy and preparation for the coming of Jesus, the promised messiah. A season of looking forward to something wonderful – the promise of the ages. And so it is.

But, is there something missing in this picture?

There is a lovely book written specifically for pregnant women. Fathers also can't put it down. It is captivating and fascinating. It is a day-by-day description, verbal and pictorial, of the physical development of a human fetus in utero. Today, the fetus has a heart. Today, the fetus has a stomach. Today, she has fingernails. Today, he has teeth buds. Today, my child has a nose. Today, our child has eyes. I wonder what color they are. Then ears, and a mouth. Hair! Hope ours has lots of it! Second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, month by month these two are coming to be whom God from all time has desired them to be. He, she, they are slowly coming – to be. With the company of this book, the mother, the parents can live in the moment with their coming to be child, the child they co-created with God. They can hardly wait. They are invited, called to be present in the wait. Invited to live life, to experience God in every moment of the wait. There is no waiting for something better.

I know Christmas is coming, but not today. Today offers (at least here in North America) snowmen, snowballs and hot chocolate with marsh-mellows. Today offers Christmas tree decorating, cookie baking, maybe gift-wrapping. Today, I am invited to bake for the homeless shelter. Today, I am invited to decorate a tree in the nursing home, to visit the children's hospital. Today, I'm invited to play with our grandchildren, sit with a dying friend. Today, I am invited to be, to live in the wait. To live in this moment. Not to wait for something better.

In every line extending from every checkout counter, every bus stop, every waiting room, every restroom there is Presence in the wait. There is a gift, an invitation, a moment to behold – God is. God is intimately present in every second of the wait. There is nothing better.

To wait is to stand in reverence and awe of the present, of the Presence. God lives only in the present. God knows no time. It is I who live in the confines of time, not God. It is I who am bound by the past and lured by the future. God is and gives only in the present. There is nothing better.

The good-news: there is nothing better than to live in God, in the present! There is no waiting here.

Maybe I could say Advent is a season of Awareness. A season to practice awareness, noticing and being present to God. God is present to me and among us now. How could I better spend my time in this season of Advent?

Joan Blandin Howard - Creighton's Christian Spirituality Program