

# Waiting

*At times there seems to be nothing worse. We wait for the results of medical tests. This can be the most excruciating kind of waiting. Our lives seem “on hold” as we wait and wait and wait for some news. We wait for the elevator, in the checkout line in the supermarket. We wait for the birth of a child, or grandchild. Nine months can seem an eternity. We wait endlessly for this pandemic to be over, or get through it somehow, so that we can get back some sense of balance and harmony, some easing of the dis-ease of waiting.*

*Painful and nerve-wracking as it can be, waiting is the soil in which hope is born. Waiting is a wide-open space of longing, of anticipating, of expecting. And it is when we long and anticipate that hope may be born in us. The American poet Emily Dickenson describes hope as*

*The thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the song without the words  
And never stops at all.*

*She is describing something very deep in us: A light, wordless longing of the human heart that dwells in the deeps of every human being. Without it we cannot take the next step, let alone fly free!*

*The readings of all four Sundays of Advent draw our eye and ear to something aborning, something yet to be. The disciple of Jesus Christ lives in hope. We hope in his word, in his promise of new and enduring life. We stake our lives on the hope that the power of love will one day prevail over all evil. We try to live this hope day in and day out, week by week, season by season. But Advent is the unique moment for Christians to look more deeply into the reason for our hope, and to discover – perhaps for the first time – the deepest hope we hold.*

*What are you waiting for?*

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# Piercing Darkness

*Advent is the time to prepare for Christmas. On this we are all agreed. Diving a little deeper we see that Advent is a season of desire. It is a time of waiting. Of anticipating. During these long days of a seemingly never-ending pandemic, our desire is smoldering. For some it has been snuffed out. We're numb. Who or what can shake us out of the doldrums?*

*Time and again, the scriptures tell that a time of intense turbulence is a wake-up call. Advent is such a time to wake up to God's promise: We will not be left comfortless.*

*We think that God is near when prayers are answered, when things go our way, when we and those we love are blessed with good health and prosperity. But God dwells in our dark days no less than in the light. And often against all odds, where and when we least expect, light pierces the darkness. God's presence and action, God's very life, is to be found between the cracks of a world and a life splitting apart. Christian spiritual guides throughout the ages advise: If you want to be sure of the path you tread, close your eyes and walk in the dark.*

*In these dark times, the eye must learn to see anew. How to look? Where to look?*

*All too often, we look in the wrong places. Advent is a wakeup call to see that God comes in the vulnerable, fragile human flesh of the Infant in that littlest town of Bethlehem at a time of unrest and uncertainty. But dare we imagine that God may be found in our own turbulent times? In our own dark days? In our own trembling flesh?*

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# Pay Attention

*Advent is ordinarily thought of as a time of waiting for the coming of Christ in our midst. And so it is. But Advent is just as much a time of watching.*

*We spend plenty of time watching. Some spend endless hours watching television, in front of computers or fixated on the smartphone. In this time of pandemic we are zooming and trying to communicate virtually, which is to say, in large part, visually.*

*We watch our children grow. We watch our parents become frail as they age. We watch the clock ticking endlessly as we await the results of medical tests. How we watch depends on what we are watching. So, we watch TV differently, with a different sort of alertness, than when we watch someone we love suffering.*

*“Watch”: A word that echoes throughout the scripture. During Advent, we are invited to a kind of watching that is filled with joyful expectation while trying at the same time to be open to the unexpected. We are to live with eyes wide open, watchful and attentive so that we might be ready for the coming of God in our midst in myriad ways.*

*Living with eyes wide open is not easy. How much easier it is to become absorbed in the many demands of day-to-day living. Our vision gets blurred. All too often, our vision is out of focus because we are distracted. And how easily we are distracted!*

*Sometimes life’s events come at us in such a way that we are simply overwhelmed and cannot help but be distracted from our course. But it is also true that we often look for distraction. Can we reflect in honesty during this Advent season and ask: What is the source of our discontentment that drives us to constantly seek distractions?*

*Moving from distraction to watchfulness is our gift and task during this Advent season. Taking a stance of watchfulness, we stand ready to live with open eyes, alert to the vital forces of God’s own life in human life, in the world, and the church.*

*What in our line of vision might be blocking the horizon of God’s coming this Advent season?*

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# The Small, Slow Work of God

*What are you waiting for? If we know what we are waiting for, then we will know how to wait. And we will know how long to wait. Because if what we are waiting for is truly good and worthwhile, we will be willing to wait as long as it takes.*

*What are we waiting for? We wait for the small, slow work of God.*

*God comes to be with us, Emmanuel, in a manger. It's all quite unexpected. There seems quite a big gap between what God's Chosen People were expecting and what they were given in the Christ Child Likewise for us, there is often a yawning gap between what we expect to happen and what in fact does.*

*Be alert! Watch! God does not enter the world like a Hollywood superhero. The King of the Jews, all the hopes and dreams of a people, is born in the small and obscure little town Bethlehem. Not in Jerusalem. Think of God entering the world in Spokane rather than San Francisco. Or Oxnard rather than Montecito.*

*Be alert. Pay attention. Hiddenness and smallness are majesty. The wounded and the weak, the last, the lost, the littlest and the least are to be seated at the head table according to God's promise. They, too, are of infinite value. Because God is found there. Where and with whom you least expect.*

*Look! Even among the poor, the sick and the ignorant, the small, slow work of God can be done and is being done. The disciple of Jesus is to live and work in hope. Hope is not the same thing as cheery optimism. Hope isn't wishful thinking. Remember that in the lifetime of some of us, the Berlin Wall came down, Apartheid crumbled, peace came to Northern Ireland (at least for the moment). Illiteracy rates worldwide are decreasing. God is at work in a corrupt world. But God's work is slow.*

*We cannot right every wrong, but we can never stop hoping in the slow small work of God. God's presence is constant. Look to those people and events, those places where you least expect God to be present. There you might find what you are looking for: the small slow work of God lying in a manger in Bethlehem.*

*Sometimes you have to learn how to see anew. And how to wait. Again. And again.*

