

Meditation “Hoping and Waiting”

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-4, I Corinthians 1: 4-9

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On this First Sunday in Advent both scripture readings touch on a time of waiting in the lives of believers. The first reading is from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 64, verses 1-4. Here the Israelites join in a communal lament about their waiting for God—wondering if it will ever end. Scholars conclude that this hymn may have been a part of their worship during the years of exile in Babylon. This is the Word of God.

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—² [a] as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!³ When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.⁴ From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for God. Amen.

The Season of Advent is a time to wait. Expectantly, no doubt and in our waiting we are expected to make preparations for that which we wait, as our children reminded us in the musical presentation of the Hanging of the Greens, but nonetheless it is a time to wait.

As we turn through the pages of time several hundred years since the prophet Isaiah spoke to the Israelites in exile, we find God’s people waiting once again. In first Corinthians 1:4-9, the Apostle Paul gives thanks for the first generation of Christians who eagerly await the return of their Risen Savior. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

⁴ I give thanks to my^[a] God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶ just as the testimony of^[b] Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷ so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ God will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful; by God you were called into the fellowship of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The title of the meditation: “Hoping and Waiting”

Let us pray. Gracious God, we thank you for the season of Advent in each of our lives when we are asked to wait. During this Advent Season, teach us the richness of waiting. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable to you, the One for whom we hope and wait. Amen.

The greens have been hung and the season of waiting begins. Today we light the first of four Advent Candles...the Candle of Hope. In the next three weeks, we will complete the circle that symbolizes Christ’s eternity nestled in the evergreen wreath, a symbol of everlasting life. The candles of hope, peace, joy, and love shed light on the character our waiting and the One for whom we wait.

Today we highlight the hope that is a part of our waiting. Ironically, the Latin word for hope *espera* literally means “to wait.” *Espera en Deo* is the motto of Hope College, my alma mater. *Espera en Deo* means to hope in God... We hope because of the Savior for whom we wait.

As we begin Advent, let us explore the importance of waiting. There is not a great moment in our lives that has not been made greater in the anticipation...in the waiting. There is a purpose to our waiting. To wait is not a bad consequence. It is not an absence or delay of experience but a deliberate action. Waiting involves the passage of time during which there can be healing, growth, introspection, and resolution. Waiting is also an integral part of human growth and development. It is at the heart of our growing up and our becoming God’s children.

Studies demonstrate that the ability to wait, to delay gratification, and to demonstrate self-control are key factors in human beings coming into their own. Delayed gratification is defined as being able to *voluntarily postpone immediate gratification and persist in self directed behavior for the sake of their preferred but delayed goals, while resisting the frustration created by competing temptations at the moment.*

There is an art to waiting even as there is a time to wait. Because we live in a culture that devalues and admonishes waiting, we need to reclaim the time as well as the art, for ourselves and for our children. In this world of advanced technology and telecommunications and immediate gratification waiting is often viewed as a sign of failure and an obstacle to our liberties. I want what I want and I want it now!!

As people of faith in this season of Advent, let us look at waiting from another perspective, from the Biblical perspective, which affirms our waiting as an act of faith. The Rev. Dr. George Buttrick, an English-born, American-based preacher whose first church was in Quincy, Illinois and who succeeded the Rev. Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin in 1927 at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York wrote this in the Interpreter’s Commentary.

In the biblical faith, God takes the initiative and labors beyond the utmost reach of our imaginings. The unceasing activity of God on behalf of God’s people is unique, altogether unlike the deities of other faiths. God is always ‘long beforehand’ with us and meets us in our work. We go out to tasks burdened with their difficulty and feeling alone in responsibility, but God was occupied in them long before we started and encounters us there.

Believing that God is taking initiative on our behalf is an important factor in our ability to wait, to wait with hope, and to wait well. When children know their parents or teachers have their best interest in mind, they are better equipped to wait their turn. How we view our Creator’s role in our destiny, likewise, affects our ability to wait. The art of waiting well is learning that delicate balance between taking creative initiative and practicing Holy indifference.

Both of our Scripture readings address people of faith who are waiting. The prophet Isaiah, on behalf of the people, cries out to Yahweh to break through their season of waiting. It has gone on too long! There is pain and anguish in these words and yet simultaneously –in the very act of their utterance there is hope.

As Ecclesiastes affirms, there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak even in our waiting. When we cry out to Yahweh in the intimacy of our waiting—claiming our identity as God’s children and pleading for God to act on our behalf—when we remind God of God’s responsibility to us and

confess our shortcomings, our confession of hopelessness becomes a confession of faith. The season of waiting may continue but there is a renewed sense of strength in that waiting. And so during this Advent Season may Isaiah's word be one of comfort for those of us who are weary in our waiting and whose waiting has gone on too long.

And to all of us, may we be reminded that we stand alongside our brothers and sisters in Corinth who know the One whose birth we celebrate this season and yet, who still wait for the fullness of God's presence in a broken world. The Corinthian believers did not lack spiritual gifts in their waiting, but they did not know how to use them to strengthen their community. May we wait in unity with all God's people, may we not be lacking in any spiritual gift as we wait, and may our gifts sustain and unite us in our waiting.

I close with additional words from the same prophet Isaiah who knew the joy and the sorrow of the season of waiting—words that have sustained believers throughout the ages:

*Even youths will faint and be weary and the young will fall exhausted;
But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength
They shall mount up with wings like eagles.
They shall run and not be weary.
They shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*

And again Isaiah writes:

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the kid,
The calf and the lion and the fatling together,
And a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)*

And again Isaiah writes:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. (Isaiah 9:6)

During this Season of Advent, *Espera en Deo*, we wait with hope for the birth of our Savior. Amen.