

Waiting in Hope November 27th 2005
 Psalm 130; Romans 8:22-28
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Psalm 130

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Romans 8:22-28

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose.

Waiting in hope is the foundation of Advent. Today is the first Sunday in Advent, a season devoted to preparing for Christmas and the coming of the child, Jesus. Many people find it odd that during this period of four weeks Christmas hymns can be heard everywhere but in church. But Advent is a time to slow down and acknowledge the power of anticipation.

The notion of advent meaning "to come" used to be tied to the coming of Jesus in the last days. Many churches still promote this way of thinking but more commonly today the coming we prepare for is the word made flesh, the incarnation of God in the Christ child.

Like Resurrection, Incarnation is a body deal: the word becomes flesh, the divine form becomes human, God reveals God self in unexpected ways, the distant one becomes the God within. Waiting and hope are body deals too. This time of year, most children are waiting for Santa, not Jesus, and hoping for presents not a savior. Waiting is a nuisance to them, a symptom fed by a collective focus on immediate gratification. We're victims of it too. It's hard to get used to waiting for a human voice when you think you are making a simple phone call. You hear the words "please hold" and before you can utter a word some recording is saying, "please stay on the line, your call is important to us...." Last week that happened to me on a call I didn't initiate. Imagine! Needless to say I didn't wait.

The process of waiting is greatly influenced by the context, or reason we wait. A gardener learns early on that his plants respond better when their normal growth process is allowed to express itself. An expectant mother knows that 9 months allows the fetus time to develop its full potential.

Waiting is a fact of life today. Whether you live in a metropolitan area or not things take time. Some waiting is frustrating, like waiting in traffic on the 405; some is painful like waiting for a loved one to come home from war or a biopsy report to be read. That kind of waiting is hard indeed, but some waiting is not only unnecessary it's unjust. Just ask the victims of Katrina in Louisiana or victims of Wilma in Florida. Too many of them still wait for federal and state resources to rebuild their lives. Or consider the victims of the Pakistani earthquake who wait for their familiar world to return and mourn the loss of loved ones, as well as their way of life.

The context of waiting and the resources we rely on shape our ability to wait. Waiting passively is a stance many take, but *active waiting* is what life requires. The Psalmist waits for forgiveness...and hopes in God.

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope.

The Psalmist believes in God's promises because he has experienced them first hand and so he waits in hope. The Apostle Paul also speaks of waiting and hoping. In Romans 8 Paul says that all Christians are waiting for adoption in Christ. The phrase "the redemption of our bodies" is Paul's way of saying that when Jesus returns all Christians will participate in his resurrection from the dead.

For years church faithful have waited for this promised fulfillment to come to fruition, but what if all of us are using the wrong lens and looking for the wrong result? I believe we are called to wait for the redemption of our bodies in this life, not the next. That means our waiting is not focused on an end time scenario that is fabricated out of the fear of hell or the hope of heaven

It means we ought to take seriously the affirmation that God is found in every human form, not just Jesus. This understanding of God's presence blows a hole in orthodox teaching that credits Jesus as being the only incarnation of God. And yet this way of understanding the Christmas story is as old as Christianity itself. It precedes the imperial rulings of the emperor Constantine in the 3rd century who had no patience for diversity. When it came to the day-to-day functions of his empire, Orthodoxy benefited the emperor, the one in power whose authority could not be questioned. But *unquestioned authority is not a mark of divine experience*. Imagination trumps obedience every time.

Obedience stifles hope, because it limits the possibility of choice, your choice and my choice. In this context waiting is a dead end experience determined by our fear of punishment or our fear of the unknown, rather than our openness to the new.

To wait with awareness is to wait with hope...to anticipate the good, not to dread the fearful. When it comes to waiting all of us have to outgrow our fears of waiting. Let me say that again: When it comes to waiting all of us have to *outgrow our fears of waiting*. You know the drill: "wait until your father/mother gets home," or what about those who experience something good then sit back and wait "for the next shoe to drop." Too often we wait without hope, believing that the universal life force we call God does not have our best interest at heart.

Even though we sing songs of praise and profess words of thanksgiving, too many people ignore the deep denials that have attached themselves in the deep recesses of their body, mind and spirit. They want to believe that God's love is unconditional, but it seems too good to be true... so they hold on to their faith... tentatively. When the slightest delay wreaks havoc in their ability to hope waiting becomes an exercise in futility.

Waiting in hope is not a passive waiting; it is an active living. Most of our lives are lived in the *meantime*, in the period between now and then. To wait in hope, to wait with awareness, particularly in Advent, is to wait for the Christ/Christa child to be borne in us, for God to be borne in us, as male and female expressions of grace.

Meister Eckhart once wrote, “What good is it to me for the son of God to be borne to Mary 1400 years ago, and yet not be borne in my life, in my culture, in my time?” Just so, what good is it to us for the son of God to be borne to Mary 2000 years ago, and yet not be borne in our life, in our culture, in our time?

Most of us have a negative view of waiting. If all we ever know of waiting is that we “can’t wait a minute longer” every minute, then the unfolding of **life as it can be** will always be thwarted by the unfolding of life as **it must be**; not on your terms necessarily but the terms and pre-conditions of your life that you have settled for because a sense of hopelessness pervades your unconscious awareness.

If we can’t wait for life to unfold gracefully and purposely, our inability to wait will always limit our ability to receive that which we deserve. An inability to wait creates an inability *to receive...to receive* the new life waiting for us right before our eyes.

If we can’t wait then we can’t put in place the changes that this new life requires. If we can’t wait, then we can’t unlearn old behaviors that protected us as children but no longer serve our life purpose. If we can’t wait...our capacity to receive is diminished. Our capacity for healing is too.

This Advent I invite you to ask yourself, what you are waiting for... not as a gimmick but as a gesture of hope. First take hold of something, literally in your hands, that reminds you that you are loved. Then allow yourself to be by yourself and meditate at least once a day on what you want to happen in your life. If you can, do this with a candle lit nearby so you can be reminded of God’s enduring light. Practice this everyday from now until Christmas and you will begin to be an “active waiter.” *Once you know what it is you are waiting for, allow yourself to co-create its arrival by living an imaginative life.* Live with a *yes*, not a *maybe*! Live with *more*, not in terms of material possessions but in terms of possibilities, and live with *hope*. Wait with hope and hope will turn your waiting into wonder. Amen.