

Faith Mennonite Church
Advent 1: An Unexpected Hour
November 28, 2010

Work and Wait

Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

[Advent is a time of watching, of waiting, of watchful waiting. During these Sundays of Advent we are inserting several periods of silence in our worship as a way to wait and to listen. Each Sunday, following the sermon, someone from the congregation will share a brief word of testimony and then a flute will open and close a time of silence. Let us be attentive to what may come to us in these brief moments of quiet.]

I don't think I've ever encountered anyone who enjoys waiting. Whether a child on a long car trip who begins asking "How long 'til we get there?" just 10 minutes into the journey, or a well-seasoned adult finding their life on hold due to a major injury or illness, none of us likes to wait.

This fall Gerald and I have begun the spiritual practice of sharing the consolations and desolations of our day with each other (the high and low points). When I picked him up after work this past Tuesday, he was barely in the car before he shared his day's desolation: he had lost two hours of precious time. He had let his morning class out early so he could catch the UST shuttle to the Minneapolis campus for a noon-hour faculty meeting. He was going because a matter of interest to the Justice & Peace Studies program he directs was on the agenda. In the end, time ran out before that particular agenda item came up. He had waited for nothing. "Fortunately I got a free lunch out of it," he said, "because I lost two hours." "Did you take anything to read?" I asked. He's usually pretty good at doing that, but he hadn't on this occasion.

Having meaningful activity can totally transform a wait. Catching up on mail or reading ahead for an upcoming class might have redeemed Gerald's wait. I've learned that long lines in grocery stores or at the post office seem to move faster when I begin looking lovingly and prayerfully at those in front of me, instead of looking at my watch and thinking of all the things on my to-do list for the rest of the day.

The scriptures on this first Sunday of Advent refer to a very special kind of waiting—waiting for the coming of God's Kingdom, the in-breaking presence of God in our world, the return of Christ and the culmination of history. People have approached this wait in many different ways throughout history: Jesus and Paul and their contemporaries were convinced that the fullness of the Kingdom was an imminent reality. When several hundred years—then thousands—passed, Christians had to revise their expectations and reconsider what it meant to wait for Christ's return. In every era Christian leaders have called the faithful to watchful living, not becoming complacent or losing faith that God will bring fulfillment and a conclusion to history. At times this has taken the form of prophetic movements predicting an immediate return of Christ; some of these have convinced people to sell all their possessions; some have even turned violent. This has caused other Christians to shy away from any conversation about ultimate things and times.

How do we wait for the coming of Christ in 2010? Are we waiting primarily for a babe in a manger with pleasant carols playing in the background and tasty confections? Or are we waiting and longing for a world made new? Can we envision with Isaiah all the peoples of the whole world gathered together peacefully into one city? Can we imagine a world where all the weapons have been turned into gardening tools? How do we get ready for this? How do we stay alert?

In England, the word “wait” is not only a verb, it can also be used as a noun. Traditionally, a watchman was known as a *wait*. A group of musicians employed to play at public functions to entertain or hold the attention of the crowd were also called a *wait*.

Our call today is not simply to wait for something to happen, but *to be a wait*. As a *wait* we are not so much bringing about the kingdom or forcing the hand of God, but we are witnesses to what God is about in the world. Jesus recalled Noah, who built an ark in the middle of dry land. Noah was a wait: he preached and he demonstrated what was about to happen. He lived into a coming reality. When the world around him was chaotic and destruction was at hand, he answered God’s call to build something constructive—a place of protection against the coming storm. He did this in the midst of life-as-usual all around him, even if others ridiculed what must have appeared to be a bit crazy.

The little corner down in our basement kitchen reminds me of Noah’s ark these days. At a time of year when shoppers are scurrying to the malls to purchase the latest gadgets, we are quietly gathering household goods for a soon-to-arrive Somali refugee family. I also saw Noah’s ark in our fellowship hall a week ago when members of our congregation and our sister congregation, Missio Dei, shared a potluck together. We got better acquainted and discussed ways to work together to support the hospitality they offer through their communal households to people living on the margins of society. This Wednesday night, on World AIDS Day, Greg Renstrom will welcome the community to Wesley Chapel, a new wait that will witness to hope in a community that has largely felt excluded by the church.

May we all use this time of Advent to renew our vision and our expectation of God’s work in the world. May we pray for wisdom to be the wait—to be the living example of that for which we are watchfully waiting.

**Response: Waiting and the act of creating a photograph
by Dan Leisen**

When I see a good photograph,
I know that to capture that great image, either the photographer was really lucky
Or, the photographer spent a lot of time preparing and waiting for that particular shot.

Recently, I’ve returned to photography as a creative art. And I’ve been attempting to photograph images that capture a certain essence or quality of something in such a way that it can re-communicate something back again to a viewer.

In photography, my experience has been that
If you are there..... And ready..... and at the right time. You *might* be rewarded with a good photograph.

A lot of photography is about getting ready for the shot. And then waiting for things to fall into place so you can push the shutter button and capture it.

I've learned that it is important to know the object you want to photograph. Before I go to a special location (like Minnehaha Falls) for a photo shoot, I may visit and do a walk thru. I check to see where I would position a camera... and I calculate when & where the sun will be for the best lighting.

On the day of a shoot, I make sure the power supply for the camera is charged, and gather the necessary lenses, filters and tripod. Once on site I make sure I get to the ideal location for the photo at the right time, get the camera in position, adjust the camera settings for the expected lighting, set the aperture and duration of an exposure, frame the scene in the camera viewfinder..... And then I wait. I wait until the sun is in t the best position to illuminate things in just the right way.

Sometimes the waiting may only be for a short time. If I correctly calculated when and where the sun would be, I'm in luck. Sometimes the wait can be longer than I expected. Sometimes a big cloud bank will move in and throw things off and I may not get the shot I wanted or at least not the shot I had planned.

But sometimes.... If I wait, if I'm ready, and the timing was right..... The light will be just what I hoped forand the image I capture will be the one I had envisioned in my mind.