

Waiting and Wondering

My sister has three children, but some seven years ago, we were all waiting on the birth of her second baby. Her daughter was three

My sister explained to Adelaide that her brother was going to be born after Christmas - time, after all, is kind of an abstract concept when you're three and waiting for a sibling. But Christmas is an easy guidepost. So Adelaide waited and waited and Christmas came and the very next day she went to my sister with all her commanding directness and said, "Where is the baby. You said he was coming after Christmas."

Trouble was, the baby was actually due in February.

Waiting is not an easy thing. There's a vulnerability to the in-between, the not-yet, the what-will-be, the what-could-be. Even when there's an assumption of a positive outcome, still, there's that tender suspension of the wait.

For Christians all over the world, right now is the season of waiting. It's called advent, which is the period of time leading up to Christmas. It's a time for reflecting, a time to make room for the good that's coming, a time to wait in the sweet not-yet before everything changes. Christmas is, after all, the Christian story of how the world was made new. This isn't a waiting for small pleasures kind of waiting - cookies in the oven, fresh laundry, coffee with a friend - this is world-transforming waiting. This is nothing will ever be the same afterwards kind of waiting. This is magic and mystery and new life waiting.

I wonder if there have been moments in your life when you felt suspended in the not yet and all its earnest hope mixed with longing and maybe some fear for all that will change.

Maybe you too were once waiting for a baby, or maybe it was test results, or the response to a question asked on bended knee - there are moments in life when time shifts and we are held in suspension between what was and what might be. In the busyness of daily life, it can be easy to forget those experiences, to get mired in the

details of living, to forget that life is, at times, beyond our imagining.

Maybe Jesus isn't your jam and advent is an obscurity to you. That's cool - we come to this place with many backgrounds and religious practices. And amidst all our diversity, I want to invite you into the hopeful space of waiting and wondering - the essence of advent.

What tender in between are you carrying with you today? Maybe you've made some significant changes to your life and you're wondering what the future holds. Maybe you're hoping that the new year will hold more connection, more love, more wholeness and you sit now in the land of the not yet. Maybe you're trying to shed some cynicism after all the struggle of the last few years and imagine the possibility of a better world, not just as a hypothetical, but as the guiding star to your own path. It takes time to make these changes, to transition into a world made new.

Advent is, of course, not only a season of waiting but also a season of darkness, of the resting and retreating before the world is remade. Two weeks ago we talked about how the holidays can throw our lives into sharp contrast, reminding us of all that has changed, all that we've lost or never really had, and amplifying the hurt. Advent asks us to take that hurt and wonder about what could be, what love might look like in all its messy humanity. The story of Christmas is, after all, not a tidy one - it's a story of life breaking through in improbable places, the sacred swaddled amidst the hay, strangers bringing gifts from far away places, and the ways that tender new life threatens tyrants and despair.

So we're not waiting for perfection, that's not the story of this season. The story of Christmas is one of connection, one in which the God on high becomes the God of flesh and love and humanity. It's the beginning of a story about the power of relationship, of loving your neighbor as yourself, especially when your neighbor has been cast aside. It's a story that asks us to wonder what could be, to wonder at who we'll meet along the journey of life.

There's so much humanity in a place like a church, so many stories of tenderness and waiting, so much wonder and wondering - together we gather up our humanity

and all this collective tenderness to remember that we are never alone, that we can withstand the suspension of time. We can keep opening our hearts even when it scares us, because, on the other side of waiting, we might just find extraordinary possibility. We might find a world made new. We might hear a story of a babe who turned into a man who drew the sacred more fully into the world and said that the greatest commandment is love.

As we move through these weeks leading up to Christmas,
may we remember to see the sacred in the messy,
may we seek the star that points us towards life,
may we rest in the waiting,
and may we remember that we need not be perfect to be loved.

Amen