

Title: Waiting for Christmas: What are you waiting for?

Date: November 26 & 27, 2016

Preaching: Senior Minister Randy Spleth

Scripture: [Isaiah 64:1-4](#)

Text: [Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

E-mail: [Randy Spleth](#)



This morning, we begin the season of Advent. The title of the sermon is "What are you waiting for?" (Pause for 30 seconds). Did you say that to yourself during that uncomfortable pause? Did you think, "What are you waiting for, Randy? That would be more grammatically correct. What are you waiting for, Randy? Get on with it.

Start your sermon." I simply paused for just half a minute. Was it hard to wait? Of course it was even though we wait all of the time. We wait in lines, in traffic and the doctor's office. We wait in in the bank's drive through and watch as the other line always moves faster than the one you choose. We wait in line at the supermarket and count the number of items in the baskets in front of you. We wait for a plane. We wait for the movie to start. We wait for a file to download, to get fast food, for the light to change. A recent study shows that the average American spends 45-62 minutes a day waiting. Let's face it; that's a lot of waiting and most of us think it is a waste of time.

And yet we come now to Advent, a season of waiting. In this season, Christians around the world experience a holy holding of their breath, releasing it with a shout of joy when Jesus is born. We wait like children who run to a Christmas tree and shout with glee when presents are finally opened. Their joy is greater because of anticipation, built up over weeks of waiting. As adults, we should feel the same anticipation. We should be experts since we spend so much time of our lives waiting. The question to ask ourselves is, "How well do I wait?" The answer depends whether we see the time as an opportunity or as a waste.

Our waiting pales in comparison of the waiting that took place in the Bible. Hundreds of years of waiting; even more years for our Jewish brothers and sisters who are still waiting since they do not believe as we do, that the Messiah has come into the world through the person of Jesus.

There is an amusing story that comes out of the Jewish tradition of waiting. It is about a man in a small European village who, because of a disabling condition, could not find employment. The community council wanted to help him but they also wanted to protect his pride. They decided to give him a job. They paid him two rubles a week to sit at the town's entrance and be the first to greet the Messiah when he arrives. "Just sit on the hill outside our village every day from dawn to sunset," they tell him. "You will be our watchman for the approach of the Messiah. And when you see him, run back to the village as fast as you can, shouting, 'The Messiah! The Messiah! He is coming!'"

The man's face lit up just thinking of the glory of his new position. Every morning he greeted the dawn from the hill and not until sunset every day did he leave his treasured post. A year went by, and a traveler, approaching the village, noticed the figure sitting on a hill. "Shalom," called the traveler. "What are you doing here?"

"I am waiting for the Messiah!" the man replied. "It's my job." The traveler was somewhat amused. "How do you like this job?" he asked, suppressing a smile. "Frankly, it doesn't pay much," said the poor man, "but it's steady work." ¹

That would be steady work if you did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah born in Bethlehem. Even with that, scripture teaches us that it was a long wait. Forty-two generations waited for Jesus. Just before Matthew describes the birth of Jesus, at the end of that long list of names that you skip over, he says, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." (Matthew 1:17) And then, "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way." (Matthew 1:18) That's a long time, 2,500 years. Do you think they asked God, "What are you waiting for?"

Of course they did. Like us, they were impatient. Of all the prophets, Isaiah anticipates God sending the Messiah and expresses his desire for God to act. He begins the 64th chapter saying, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!" (Isaiah 64:1-2) It was a tough time. Isaiah lived in a time when the people of Israel were suffering. Isaiah knew that they couldn't save themselves. They needed a Savior. "What are you waiting for God?"

Scripture comes to the answer. God was waiting for the right time. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." (Galatians 4:4-5) God chose right time, planned and conceived a set time for Jesus to be born. Any earlier and Jesus would have been premature. Any later and Jesus would have been late. It was planned pregnancy. God set the date.

Why then? What were you waiting for, God? God was waiting for all of the prophecies to be fulfilled. God was waiting until Alexander the Great had established the Greek culture and language so that the word could get out and the Roman Empire had achieved world domination at that time and developed a system of road so that the Good News could be spread. And God was waiting for the human heart to be ready, for a hunger for something greater than the ancient religions and mythologies. The time was right prophetically, politically, culturally and religiously. Jesus came at the right time, in the fullness of time. What are you waiting for, God? God was waiting for the set time, the right time.

It is a truth to live your life by. God is never early. God is never late. God is always right on time. Jesus was right on time even though forty-two generations waited, lived, waited and even died, waiting faithfully, waited with hope. The problem they had and the problem we have is the assumption that nothing is going on. But scripture reminds us that God was busy working behind the scenes, creating this plan for the world and us, preparing for the fullness of time.

Expectant mothers sometimes think, "Is this baby ever going to come?" But all you have to do is look at her and you know that it is impossible for the baby not to come. The baby has to come out! She just has to wait until everything is ready.

It is the way it is with Jesus. God was getting the world ready, casting vision through prophets. Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. His mother would be virgin. He would be from the tribe of Bethlehem, a child promised to David that would be his descendent. With all this information, God's people waited, they waited with hope for the One that was promised.

Isaiah, wishing that God would tear open heaven and come down, in the same breath acknowledges that "God... works for those who wait for him." (Isaiah 64:4) He knows the truth of the preacher. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). It is the truth that we are reminded of during the season of Advent and one which we should live our lives by. We need to trust that God is never early.

God is never late. God is always right on time. Let that inform your waiting, now in this season. It's your opportunity of waiting. God is never early, never late, always right on time, the first truth when embrace in this season of waiting and the second is this. We are waiting for something even better.

Advent teaches us that something better is coming, something more wonderful than what we can imagine. What are we waiting for? We are waiting for a time when people go up to the mountain of the Lord, a time when many are taught his ways and walk his path. A time when nations "beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isaiah 2: 4). The Savior of the world came to us in the babe of Bethlehem but this was just the beginning. We wait with the understanding that it won't always be like this. It won't always be a struggle. We wait in hope and anticipation of a better day, promised by God, a time of God's final victory over sin and suffering where everyone will have a place and a home with God.

There is a lovely story that reminds us of this second truth of waiting. It comes from a couple of decades ago when missionaries were working in one of the war torn countries of the former Soviet Union. They were caring for children in an orphanage and, like anyone who has been involved in ministry with such kids, they were simply overwhelmed by the tragedy of so many children who'd been abandoned.

On one occasion this missionary couple were teaching the children about Christmas. They told them all about Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, and about the baby Jesus. They told them all about the stable, and the manger, and the star in the sky. They told them all about God's love for the world embodied in the birth of Jesus. And after teaching the children the Christmas story, this couple invited them to draw some pictures of the manger scene.

All of the pictures were wonderful! But one in particular caught their attention. It was drawn by a little boy named Misha. And what made Misha's drawing distinctive was that there was not one, but two babies lying in the manger.

"Misha, what a wonderful picture!" said the woman missionary. "But who is the other baby in the manger with the baby Jesus?"

Misha looked up with a lovely expression on his face. "The other baby is Misha," he smiled. "OH? How is it that you added yourself to the manger scene?" she asked.

And this is what Misha said. "When I was drawing the picture of the baby Jesus, Jesus looked at me and said, 'Misha, where is YOUR family?' I said to Jesus, 'I have no family.' Then Jesus said to me, 'Misha, where is your home?' And I said to Jesus, 'I have no home.' And then Jesus said to me, 'Misha, you can come and be in my family and live in my home.'" ²

It is a lovely reminder of the truth of our Advent waiting. We wait in anticipation of a time when we all will all have a home with God. All creation, even ourselves are groaning in labor pains, eagerly waiting our adoption. Or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his Tegel Prison cell. "Life...may be compared to Advent: one waits, hopes, and does this, that, or the other—the door is shut, and can only be opened from the outside." ³ Advent is our not just a season, it is our life. We wait and wait and wait for our right time.

This is what Advent is really about. It's not about stringing lights and singing carols or about shopping until we drop. It is about preparing ourselves to celebrate that when the right time came, when in the fullness of time, God sent Jesus. And when the right time comes again, God will send Jesus again and we will have a home.

What are you waiting for? This is what we are waiting for, the promise of scripture, our hope and redemption.

¹ Leo Rosten, *The Joys of Ynglish* (New York: McGraw Hill Publishing Company, 1992).

² Martin C. Singley, III, <http://www.tellicochurch.org/Year%20B%20Sermons/021224.html>.

³ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *God Is In the Manger* (Kindle Locations 237-239). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.