

The Work of Waiting
Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44
December 2, 2007

Advent is the season of waiting. We aren't accustomed to waiting these days. We used to wait for days for mail to arrive from across the country. Now we receive e-mail instantly or packages overnight. We used to wait until we got home to use the phone – or at least found a pay phone somewhere along the way. Now we simply connect an earphone and immediately make the call. We used to spend an hour fixing a nice meal; now we pull a dish out of the freezer, pop it in the microwave, and by the time we've poured something to drink, a meal is ready to eat!

So it is hard for us to hear the preacher tell us that Advent is the season of waiting. We're into instant gratification. We'll just call another number where our order will be filled more quickly. There's no time to wait; we're too busy. We'll just take the goods and run.

But Advent says, "STOP! You're running too fast! You're missing out on life; you are missing out on God. Stop! Wait! Watch! God is coming!"

The word Advent literally means "to come." It is a season when we remember God's coming in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Advent is a time to reflect on how God continues to come to us daily in the present. And Advent calls us to look forward to a time when God will come and inaugurate God's peaceable kingdom in fullness on earth. It is a season to be mindful of the ways in which God has come, is coming, and will come. That's what we are waiting for: for God to come.

The question is: how do we wait? How do we live between the time of Christ's coming in humility as a babe in a manger and the time when Christ's kingdom will be revealed in all its fullness? How do Christians wait for God to come?

Advent waiting is not a passive or idle activity. The root word for wait is the same root word for watch. Waiting means to watch, to pay attention to what God is doing around us. Waiting means to be alert and awake – to stop sleepwalking through life mindlessly tending to business as usual.

Noah was alert. He paid attention to God's presence and followed God's direction to prepare for the future, even though it made him the laughing-stock of his neighborhood. If you're looking for a fun family activity this season, Evan Almighty was just released on DVD and it offers some good laughs. Noah's neighbors go on with life as usual, eating and drinking, marrying and partying—having their backyard barbecues—while their crazy neighbor is building a boat next door—building a huge ark hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean. These

business-as-usual people simply write Noah off as a lunatic. They fail to attend to God's presence, as Noah does. Noah is alert and awake. He realizes that business as usual could be hazardous to his future. So he actively engages in the mission to which God calls him. The work of waiting is action.

The work of waiting is also prayer. Friday night for a few minutes I was alone in the car waiting for family members. It was a refreshing moment of peace and quiet at the end of a long month. It was a welcome time of waiting, for there in the darkness, I thought of Isaiah's passage, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." My heart was overflowing with the faces of many in our congregation and community who walk in darkness these days and who long for God's light to come to them. As I waited I lifted those people and families up in prayer, one by one, picturing them in the darkness and watching as God's light shone upon them, surrounding them with hope, healing, peace, and love. The work of waiting is prayer.

Prayer is waiting on God. It is a reminder that we are not alone. It doesn't mean that we are going to get what we want. It is keeping watch for what God is going to do. We don't know what God will do. We don't know how God will act. We don't know the hour or the day. But we wait, trusting that God is indeed going to act.

If you wait for something in the future, what you wait for is going to affect the quality of your life in the present. Remember those assuring words from Isaiah, the 40th chapter: "They who wait upon 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."

People who wait on the Lord have amazing strength. They are the people about whom we say, "How did you do it?" "Where did you get all that strength?" "Why don't you get discouraged?" "How can you be so hopeful about the future?"

They are "waiters on God." They have the endurance of long-distance runners. In long distance running, endurance is only part of the physical training. It is also a matter of character, what we would call spiritual discipline, keeping on when you want to quit, hanging in there, expecting that hardship and deprivation are just part of the course, enduring it. That's what makes a successful long-distance runner. And it is what characterizes those people who learn to wait on God. They can run and not be weary.

The work of waiting is action- active response to the call of God to right the wrong or bring new life.

The work of waiting is prayer – paying attention to God's presence in our midst.

The work of waiting is waiting on God – trusting that God is going to act.

As you move through this Advent season, don't just tend to business as usual. Make sure that you are not sleepwalking. Enter this season with alertness and attention to God's movement in our midst. May your waiting be marked by action, prayer, and trusting that God will act. Stop! Wait! Watch! Lest you miss out on God!

Rev. Lori Best Sawdon
Lafayette United Methodist Church
Lafayette, CA