

I can't wait!

Ladies in waiting

Hurry up and wait.

Time waits for no one.

Waiting for Godot.

Wait a minute!

Is it worth the wait?

Advent is about waiting. One of more memorable Advents in my life was when I was 8 months pregnant. I was really tired of waiting. At the point of lying down more than I was walking about, I really didn't care what chaos would be wrought by the coming of this particular child. I just was sick, literally, of waiting for him to arrive.

Last week I was catching up with a friend of mine from high school who lives in town. We were lamenting the state of the country and the world. You know, as you do. "What is it going to take to get us out of this mess," she said. "The Second Coming of Christ, maybe?" I replied. I looked at the imaginary watch on my wrist and said, "He's really late you know."

In that moment I became a member of the congregation addressed by the second letter of Peter. They, too, were wondering what had become of this elusive Messiah who had promised a return engagement. It was now approximately 50 years since Mary Magdalene had shared her news with the apostles. Small children were being told by their grandparents, “Yes, Esther, there is a Savior Jesus. Just Believe!”

But, it’s hard to keep believing when there seems to be no evidence to the contrary. Not only hasn’t Jesus returned as we expected, but what does this say about whether God intervenes in this world.

To that the writer of 2 Peter says: Just hold on there a minute!

First, God’s time is not our time. We are stuck in a linear frame, God rules infinity. Who’s to say that one day here isn’t a thousand on God’s clock. Who’s to say that God’s using a clock at all? Maybe we’re not the ones who are waiting? Maybe God is waiting on us!

Oh my, that’s a twist.

Or is it? Perhaps it's not so strange when we look at the expectations of God in previous settings. Let's start with Second Isaiah. Written during the Babylonian captivity, this message is for people who have experience disaster. These people were depressed at the state of their world. They were afraid. They didn't know what was coming next. All that was familiar had been taken from them. Sounds rather familiar, doesn't it?

It certainly did to the writer of Mark's gospel. At the time of this writing (nearly parallel the second epistle of Peter), Rome has been crowning, assassinating, and re-crowning emperors since Nero. The current Caesar is Vaspasian, a general who joys in besieging Jerusalem. What good news could there be? The gospel writer look back to Isaiah. Go to the wilderness. Go to where God can be found. Find the one who cries out there. Listen to him.

And the voice in the wilderness cries "Repent. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

In the midst of all of our waiting and wailing, God's people ask "How long?" "How long before you come to save us?" "How long before this mess is over?"

God answers, "You. Tell. Me."

God awaits us. God awaits our metanoia – our turning from sinful ways. God awaits our repentance. Sewanee homiletics professor William Brosend declares it thus: "God's not waiting for more sinners to send to eternal flame; God's waiting for another reason – our repentance! The patience of the Lord IS salvation – not OUR salvation.

How refreshing to be reminded that this is all in God's time. God's time cannot be defined by earthly standards. Human beings cannot alter it. Anyone who believes that they can force the Second Coming is horribly mistaken, blasphemous even. God controls time and the ultimate moment of judgement at the same time this God waits for we beloved children to repent and return. This kind of patience is what makes God, God.

This may be God's time, but we cannot forget that we have a part in the plan. Not only must we pay attention and repent of our sin, but we also must prepare the way for God's coming. We must clear the obstacles that we have set, or that others have set before us, to keep the Word of God at a distance. What might those obstacles be? For me they are not physical as much as psychological. Anger, fear, self-doubt. Oh, and laziness too. All of these keep me from a rich relationship with God. What's worse is that these tendencies may lay down an obstacle for someone else. It's one thing to do it to myself. It's quite another to recognize yourself as a stumbling block for others.

Repent, therefore. Accept forgiveness. Work for justice. Prepare the way. God counts on us to do our part in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth. A new heaven and a new earth that comes in God's time.

William Brosend commentary on Isaiah 40:1-11 in *Feasting on the Word*: Year B, Vol. 1, pg 26.