

Today marks the beginning of Advent, a time Christians observe as a season of waiting. It's no wonder the season of Advent aligns with pagan rites of waiting through the cold of winter. We watch as the longest night of the year approaches, anticipating the dark cold. Nature is dormant. Life bubbles beneath the surface. We wait for the Christ Child to come again.

I remember experiencing this kind of waiting while pregnant with our first child, Alexander. I didn't know what to expect. Having never given birth, my feelings were complicated. I felt fear, but I also felt hope. Most of all, Kirk and I were filled with excited anticipation and a longing for this new being to finally arrive, knowing that our lives would be forever changed and enriched.

This is just one example of what Advent waiting might feel like. Advent waiting can take as many forms as there are people in the world or moments in a day. However, it's possible to blink and miss it. Advent is here and gone in a flash, especially in times such as these. Distracted by world events as well as daily life, it's easy to let Advent wash right over. As writer Marina McCoy says, Advent requires us to make space. She talks about the need to focus on being open and aware by asking, "What concerns or worries can I release in order to make room for Jesus to come again this Christmas?"

This is not a trivial matter. Releasing concerns and worries can feel like an insurmountable, unending task.

In the reading from Isaiah this morning, we heard the concerns and worries of the Israelites, who crave God's presence among them.

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From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those who wait for him.

...

"God, who works for those who **wait** for him." There it is: the word "wait." Isaiah writes of waiting for long, long periods, wondering about the presence of God. He writes of people looking for certainty, for reassurance of God when God remains hidden. Isaiah writes about faith, saying simply that waiting for God is enough. And wait they did, through hundreds of years of exile and persecution.

Indeed, waiting can be painful, especially when we find the fabric of our lives has become uncomfortable and, sometimes, even excruciatingly difficult.

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I chatted with John Harper on Thursday, who, as you know, is recuperating from a broken leg. When I called, he answered the phone in true Harper style: “Grand Central Station... how may I direct your call?”

I told him how sorry I was that this happened. But in describing his situation, John said, “I tend to look at the silver lining. I could be sitting at home, like so many people I know, having Thanksgiving dinner all alone, with not a soul around to share company and conversation. But instead, I look around here and marvel at what a wonderful place this is. I am in a COVID-free wing, I’ve gotten calls from so many friends and loved ones from around the country (as a side note, John says he credits the Jerry Howe gossip channel for the rapid spread of news), and I was just treated to fabulous meal surrounded by incredible staff who care for me. They are catering to my every whim.”

Well, John, that’s Advent waiting!

And that’s just one example of what Advent waiting can be... I know that every one of you would offer a different and wonderful story of your Advent waiting.

What I understood in listening to John’s words is that he acknowledges the difficulty of breaking one’s leg, but he is also open to the unexpected wonders that happen as a result. In other words, he can observe the difficulty without letting it dominate. Healing will take time and it will not always be easy. Waiting comes with uncertainty. But waiting can also bring unexpected joys, if you are alert and awake for them.

What unexpected experiences have you had because you were open and aware?

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Over the past year, Kirk and I have developed a habit of walking every day. We’ve mapped out a path that takes us about 45 minutes to complete. It’s one of our favorite parts of the day, a time for us to talk with and listen to one another with undivided attention. Sometimes we talk the entire time; other days, we enjoy just being in the present moment together. We often note changes in the flora and fauna as the seasons come and go.

We marvel at how the land changes as time flows—from the ice and snow to budding green to lush summer followed by crisp fall and back around to winter. We remember seasons past, and we anticipate seasons to come, but what’s special about our walks is the immediate experience of nature and how we are invited to weave a path through it, observing its changing beauty.

Even as the days shorten and temperatures fall, we find that our wonder in God’s creation can eclipse the discomfort of the cold, if we allow it. IF we allow it; if we keep alert and awake for it!

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us to be alert and awake for the unexpected.

“Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his workers in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

Whether in Advent or in life as a whole, we are called to keep awake, to be aware that the waiting may numb us to the possibility, opportunity, and beauty of life experiences, even those that are difficult. Whatever the season brings, be awake to the gifts at hand.

Meanwhile, like Isaiah, we wait for God, “who works for **those who wait** for him.” In some translations, the passage reads, “God, who works for **those who long** for him.” Yet another translation says, “God, who works for **those who put their hope** in him.”

A peek at the etymology shows the Hebrew word for wait, “ḥak-kêh” (haw-KAH), is related to an older root word meaning “to pierce, to cut through, carve, or engrave.” This suggests a more complete picture of waiting for God, a scenario where God is somehow engraved on our hearts as an indelible mark—like the warp threads of a weaving that provide the reassuring presence of structure without prescribing the individual expression of the weaver.

The season of Advent is a time to remember that while we wait for God, we already know God's presence. Staying awake and alert is effortless when we sit back and observe that God's presence is hardwired into us, threads running through.

I recently started my winter crafts. As I sorted through my stash of yarn this week, I kept thinking about weaving. Years ago (I think it was in 2003), I attended my first diocesan convention, which also happened to be the first convention over which Bishop Alan presided. A fiber artist specializing in weaving was on hand to render the proceedings as a work of art that would reflect the fabric of the Diocese of Iowa. Every attendee was given a weaving kit, with instructions on how to use it. There was a card fit with rows of string: the warp. There was also yarn to use as we saw fit to weave our creation, using the warp. We were also given time during which to weave and pray.

I was left with an indelible impression of God's presence: in the fabric of life, ours is the weft, God's is the warp. We co-create our life with God. We get to choose from an infinite array of colors and patterns, weaving into what God has given us.

Like Advent, weaving asks us to make space. We have to leave room for the warp threads, we have to leave time to sit back and look at our work. That's a particular kind of waiting that takes patience and a certain objectivity—an openness that keeps us alert and awake for opportunities to make a better tapestry.

While we wait, we open ourselves to that presence. While we wait, we may feel hope or we may feel longing. While we wait, we may continue to weave or we may stop to observe the tapestry so far.

This year, I weave my Advent waiting with walks in nature, yarn crafts, joyful music that brings unexpected cadences, and poems like this one by Wendell Berry.

It's called "The Peace of Wild Things"

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

How will you weave your Advent season?

[music to follow: [Sonata Jucunda](#) by Heirich von Biber]