

Advent Time

The Reverend Deborah Cook, Grace Church in Haddonfield
The First Sunday of Advent, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary
November 30, 2008

Advent time is patience time. And we, as a people, are not very patient.

Impatient, in fact, would be a more accurate term.

Let's look at how we live—microwaves to cook our food more quickly (and pre-prepared meals to go along with that); 'fast' food; the internet so we can access information and entertainment on a non-stop basis; wireless phones and Blackberrys to keep us in constant contact with other persons, all that non-stop information, and allow us to have music on demand. We have built an economic system that relies on credit to get what we want when we want it, rather than saving for it—a system that encourages consumption and acquisition and meeting projected quarterly profits rather than promoting investment and taking the long view.

It is insidious, this impatience. It affects our lives in ways that we even fail to see, and in some ways that are too blatant to ignore—such as the case of the impatient shoppers outside a Walmart on Friday morning who literally ran over a store employee in their pursuit of snaring a discounted price on a flat panel TV or other must-have item. Or when a horrific car crash is caused by someone who was just unwilling to wait for the next green light. It is then, God willing, that we stop and reflect, taking a moment to look at ourselves—as a society, as an individual—and ask, what have we become? Is this where we really want to be? I hope not.

Advent time is waiting time.

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Today's readings speak of a people who wait—anxiously, longingly, and yes, even impatiently—for a savior, for redemption. The Hebrew people waited to be freed from slavery, waited for the Promised Land, waited for a king. When taken into exile, they waited for God to send someone who would return them to their land. And when they lived under foreign rule, they waited for a savior, a Messiah. Themes of waiting, of longing, of anticipation are abundant in scripture; just look at the pleas from God's people to God for restoration, refreshment, direction, and aid in the Psalms alone. Even today, even now, we are still a people who wait—waiting for the Second Coming, for Christ's return. It may be safe to say that God's people are people who wait—wait for God, wait for things in God's time.

But waiting for things in God's time is hard. After all, we ask, what is taking God so long? Doesn't God see what is going on? Wars and famine, terrorism and violence, greed and poverty—wouldn't this be a good time for God to jump in and fix things? And as we wait, impatiently, it can be easy to lose heart. We throw up our hands, feeling too small against the seemingly endless tidal wave of bad news, and start to doubt that God cares, that God listens, or sometimes to even doubt that God ever really acted at all. After all, where's the proof?

And that is the whole point of waiting for God's time—it is based on trust, on faith, on hope, and not on empirical proof. It believes that the circumstances we currently see do not tell the whole story. Such faithful waiting is grounded in the belief of God's promises, of trust in a God who loves us even when our most impatient behavior can cause unspeakable harm. For when we trust

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God, we can wait—patiently. We can have confidence that God will act, that God has our best interests at heart and is working to bring our lives to fullness and wholeness—in God’s way. And God is not satisfied with the quick fix—for God is a patient God. Certainly, God could intervene in many things, and command obedience. But that would be going against God’s way—the way of love, of free will, of way of transforming the world from the inside out, one person at a time. Maybe not the most efficient way to bring in the Kingdom of God, but certainly effective—just look at Jesus. One person, one life—given for many. One person who transformed the world—in God’s way. One person—our savior, our redeemer, our God.

Advent time is preparation time.

This time, this block of days before the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord, is a time to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ in our lives, for meeting Jesus face to face. It is a time to prepare our hearts and souls to receive Christ. The secular world would have us believe that it is all about shopping, finding the perfect gift, working ourselves into a decorating, baking, entertaining frenzy. But it need not be that way. We do have a choice: we can concentrate on what God wants, who God calls us to be, rather than getting swept along with the crowd. And in that choosing, we can use this time of waiting and preparation to transform our impatience, and thus transform the world.

You see, all those things that have sprung from our impatient nature are not necessarily bad things: the internet and wireless devices and speedy computers have brought many good things

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to our world as well. It is all in how we use them. The same could be said for the energy that flows from our impatience. Think about it—what would the world look like if we were as impatient about solving world hunger, or poverty, or spreading the gospel message as we are about getting through the supermarket checkout line? Chances are, it could look very different—maybe even more like the Kingdom of God.

And that is worth waiting for.

Amen.

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