

Advent Teaches Us How to Wait

by Sean Collins

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**Readings: Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalms 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14,
First Thessalonians 3:12--4:2, Luke 21:25-28, 34-36**

Good evening!

Those who know me know that it's difficult for me to sit and wait, so I tend to over-plan and organize to fill the time. When I was a little boy, no older perhaps than seven, I began a Christmas Eve tradition that has persisted to the present day at my parents' house. After going to Midnight Mass, I watch my family go off to bed, but I stay awake - no, not to see Santa (my little sister told me his truth when I was six) - but to organize presents underneath the tree. I started doing this because I was so excited to be opening presents on Christmas morning and my family watches each person open their gifts one at a time, so I wanted to make sure that everyone got their turn and that no one felt left out as we engaged in the great unwrapping on Christmas morning. My sisters always maintain it's so that I get to be the first to open a present or that I'm a touch anal retentive, and...well...they're not necessarily wrong. It can just be so difficult to sit around and wait for a good thing to happen sometimes.

Advent is a season of reminding and waiting: reminding us that God became like one of us some 2,018 years ago (maybe in a manger, but definitely in what is now the West Bank), and waiting for the symbolic celebration of that birth as well as waiting still for the fulfillment of a promise made almost 2,000 years ago to a group of itinerant preachers that Jesus would be coming back and that all would be made right again.

Humans, I feel, are not creatures comfortable with waiting. It might harken back to some more primitive aspect of our mammalian nature, but it does not seem inherently natural - to be "ladies and gentlemen in waiting," that is, especially as Americans.

At times, frankly, it can be downright infuriating to wait for this justice we've been promised.

It can be infuriating when a Church dealing with rampant sexual abuse tells LGBTQI people that we are "intrinsically disordered" and bars certain people from serving in its ranks because of their gender.

It can be infuriating when politicians who wrap themselves in their "Christian values" demonize people for being of color or trans, for being victims of gun or sexual violence, or for supporting economic policies that give aid to those who so desperately need it.

It can be infuriating when the "Moral Majority" clamors about keeping Christ in Christmas and that Starbucks cups are holiday neutral, but maintains full support of a president who advocates using tear gas and even lethal force against crowds of asylum seekers at our borders.

It can be absolutely infuriating.

It is exhausting to be waiting for a perfect place where there is no suffering, where Jesus welcomes the flock into eternal glory, where everyone is treated equally and is enriched with God's love. It can feel like there is no hope. It can even feel like there is an absence of God in our world.

And yet, God knows this. God knows that we grow impatient. God knows that we are frustrated. God knows that it can be a burden to remain a Christian in a seemingly un-Christian world.

God knew this in the days of the Old Testament and tells us and the Israelites (who seemed to need constant reminding) that the promise made is not forgotten, as in the reading in Jeremiah, "The days are coming...when I will bestow on Israel and Judah all the blessings I promised them."

And God also knows that it is difficult to be patient and wait for this time to come.

But assurance is given to those who remain devoted to God and show God's love to others, as said in Psalms: "All the paths of Adonai are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep God's covenant and decrees." Weeks ago we were reminded by Chris Alberti of God's greatest decrees - Love your God with all your might and treat others with the same love you show yourself.

And so this, my friends, is how we wait without losing hope or, frankly, our minds:

Not in silence.

Not with a status update.

Not with inaction.

But by loving.

Loving our God and loving our neighbor.

Loving our neighbor - even the one espousing that we must "Make America Great Again."

Of course this can be difficult at times, but to you I say this - there is more than one type of love and I believe, rather firmly, that when Jesus spoke of loving those who hate us, he was indeed speaking of a love that the Ancient Greeks knew as agape. Now eros is the love we feel and act upon toward those we seek a romance with, and the love felt and demonstrated by this

community of friends when we walk through the doors of St. John's is known as philia. Agape is, however, a universal love for humanity: A love for people because they are human, where you treat them with dignity and kindness no matter who they are because they are, again, human. To borrow from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this means "we love people not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but we love them because God loves them. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does."

So love the person, but hate the sin - sounds familiar, doesn't it? Well, what's gay-er than turning a phrase to suit our own purposes?

And showing agape is by no means easy, but it doesn't mean that it cannot be done. All it takes is for you to continue to share in and demonstrate God's love in your own life.

It's echoed in the first letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, "make more and more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live....the life that God wants, as you learned from us, and as you are already living it."

Living authentically (which is living as God wants) is something that is well known to each and every one of us. I've always felt that we as LGBTQI people have an advantage over others because we know the people we are meant to be far more than our straight cis-gendered peers do about themselves; I believe that's why we don't see as many mid-life crises as they do. We each have a level of introspection that came with the experience of having to define ourselves outside of the societal norms that allows us to truly see life as God wants us as individuals to see it.

And if we have already mastered the art of loving ourselves as God wants us to then, to appropriate something RuPaul frequently says, "Now that you love yourself, it's time to love the hell out of somebody else." Now is the time to share that love that we know to others, even those we don't like, especially during Advent.

This is even more true in the often chaotic times we find ourselves in.

Wasn't that what was told in tonight's reading from Luke?

Undoubtedly, hearing about the end of days is slightly reminiscent of the past weeks and months: We have a president who advocates violence and refuses to disavow those Americans who seek to destroy every community that is not buying into the white patriarchy. We have a planet that is choking from the pollution we have poured into it, creating storms and weather patterns we have never seen with such frequency. We have a group of people who wish to see us dead or at least excluded from a public life, even going so far as to put billboards up about it in Times Square. We see communities terrorized by laws of erasure and disenfranchisement, as

well as by certain members of law enforcement who assault their character (and at times their bodies) on a weekly and even daily basis.

But...

“When these things begin to happen, stand up straight and raise your heads, because your ransom is near at hand...Be on guard lest your spirits become bloated with indulgence, drunkenness and worldly cares.”

So stand up. Be on your guard. Don't numb the fear, the pain, or the worry with idleness, apathy, or inebriation. Confront injustice when it finds itself at your door and your neighbor's door. Stand proud and stand up for your brothers and sisters. Demonstrate love of God, of yourselves, and of one another. Don't wait in silence and inaction, especially at this time.

Did Larry Kramer or Cleve Jones wait in silence and inaction for the government to acknowledge the AIDS crisis and give funding to medical research?

Did Sister Mary Lanning or Dorothy Day wait in silence and inaction for authorities to step in and give aid to the starving and the homeless?

Did John McNeil and Daniel Helminiak wait in silence and inaction for the Church to accept them and others because they were LGBTQI Catholics?

No, they did not wait. They were not silent. They did not wait for life to pass them by, but rather they shared themselves, their love, and all they had to offer with the rest of humanity for the benefit of their supporters as well as their detractors. And neither should we wait in silence. For if we make God's love known by sharing our lives and sharing our experiences and sharing all we have to offer as God's creations with everyone (especially our enemies), then we have nothing to fear when this time of waiting comes to an end, whenever that may be.

It's about organizing the presents we all have to offer humanity to ensure a better world where everyone is included in bearing witness to the great “unwrapping” of Jesus's presence once more in our world, whether it be Christmas morning or not.

And so I pray that each one of us is given the strength, the patience, and the depth of compassion it will take to continue living out God's creation in the form of each of us and to show love at every turn, especially when it is most difficult.

God bless each and every one of you this Advent season and always.

Amen.