



# WAITING

## AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



PRESENTED BY THE FAITH FORMATION BOARD  
2021



**East Liberty  
Presbyterian Church**

THE CATHEDRAL OF HOPE





Advent is the beginning of our church's calendar and the season when we wait for the coming Messiah, the baby Jesus. As we consider what it means to Wait on the Lord this Advent season the Faith Formation Board has collected 24 stories of waiting from members and friends of our congregation. People were asked to share a time when they had to wait, or what waiting means to them. The stories have been organized around the four themes of Advent; Hope, Peace, Love and Joy which we will also be reflecting on each week in worship. This is a beautiful collection which we hope will help us see God and each other in new and meaningful ways. Thank you to everyone who shared their story!

Parents: We are excited to have authors of all ages in our Advent devotional. Some stories will be more meaningful for adults and older teens. Stories that are particularly kid friendly or where written by kids are found on days 12/1, 12/3, 12/6, and 12/22.

This devotional can also be found on our church website, [www.ELPC.church](http://www.ELPC.church)



HOPE



1 Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

2 Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.

6 I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

7 Israel, put your hope in the Lord,  
for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.

8 He himself will redeem Israel  
from all their sins.



We ourselves...groan inwardly while we wait for adoption,  
the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved.

– Romans 8:23-24a

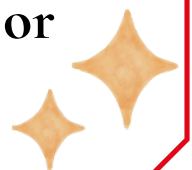
Neither of our two children were born on their expected due dates, which I believe is not unusual. Charlotte was late enough that Beth was scheduled to be induced on February 15th. But as we waited for that date to come, Charlotte had her own schedule in mind and was quite energetically born the day before, February 14th – Valentine’s Day. Despite all our plans and doctor visits, she clearly had her own timetable in mind and stuck to it.

On a different note, I was able to be present when both of my parents died. My father died after a short illness in 2010; my mother died after a long history of lung disease in 2012. My two siblings and I were able to be in the room during their final hours, and in both cases I was present when their breathing slowed and finally stopped. Those hours of

waiting were spent sharing memories, offering words of encouragement, and lifting up prayers for ourselves and these two wonderful people.

Waiting by definition involves looking ahead to something – whether to a new chapter of life beginning with a birth or a long chapter of life closing with a death. As we wait, there are many emotions swirling around. Before a child is born, we wonder what they will look like and what their life will be like in the years to come. When a loved one dies, we grieve the loss of their presence in our life even as we pray that they may know lasting peace, rest and grace in the presence of their God and Redeemer. Groaning may be a part of this waiting time – whether labor pains or sadness over loss. But hope is also a part of this time, and in that hope we truly are comforted and saved.

I still find comfort in these very different experiences of waiting. In waiting for my children to be born or



accompanying my parents at their deathbeds, I sensed God's presence nearby. I knew that whatever the future held, I would not be entering it alone. In moments of sadness and of joy, a loving God was also in those rooms and in all our hearts, including my own.







In 2016, I started my first position in the field of child welfare. It was working with youth who aged out of foster care. I took the position because I knew I wanted to work as a Child Protective Service worker, but I was told by a recruiter that I needed at least a year of direct service working in a related field.

The working conditions were far from ideal: the program was housed within a building that had numerous services for homeless individuals. It was in the middle of downtown and I did not get parking reimbursed, but I had to provide community outreach so I either paid to park or walked over a mile to and from the building when I parked across the river. Then I had to wait until I got a year's experience before I could take the civil service exam.


That year was LONG, to say the least: it was a year of frequent burnout, cutting coupons and being frugal because my salary did not match my experience.

When I hit a year, I finally got to take the civil service, only to find out two months later that my scores were nullified because I missed some new policy the state implemented for applicants who applied to CYF before they took the exam. The recruiter asked me to be patient and wait 90 days before applying to CYF again.

Rebounding from burnout and devastation I took a casual position in a completely unrelated field until I could reapply. By the time I could reapply, I did so but I honestly was planning for a complete career change.


Months later, as I sat at my computer working in patient access at UPMC, I got the email to my phone from the state telling me I was being offered a position with CYF. That moment was surreal: everything I worked hard for finally materialized.

My sweat and tears were truly a sign of my higher calling and purpose.



It was hard to wait on my birthday because I had to wait so long for the celebration because I had school and then I had Open House. It helped me to remember that I'm waiting but there's a purpose - I wasn't just waiting around, I was doing things.

Mom and Ellie and Daddy helped me remember that it's worth the waiting. When everybody at school knew it was my birthday and said something about it, I felt loved.





We don't go a day without experiencing waiting. We wait for the bus. We wait at stop lights. We wait for a family member to get out of the shower. We wait for coffee to brew. We spend significant time waiting. Culturally, we've spent almost two years in a state of waiting. Waiting for Covid statistics. Waiting for a vaccine. Waiting to go out in public. Waiting to visit family. Waiting to reopen businesses. You'd think we'd be more comfortable with waiting, but we aren't.

Waiting can cause excitement and anticipation, the kind we feel about a pending vacation, holiday, or birth of a child.

Waiting can provoke dread and anxiety, of medical test results or of job performance evaluations. And waiting can even be neutral, like waiting for the bus (unless we're late), or laundry.


When I was still teaching, I used to tell seniors who were waiting for college decisions "It's out of your hands now.

You've done your work, now you just wait. While you're waiting, keep living life." We put off too much while waiting, thinking that life is "on hold." We wait until the kids are in school. We wait til school's out. We wait until we have enough money. We wait until we feel better. All the while, we don't acknowledge that the waiting period IS life too. Waiting periods are powerful times of reflection, conscious or un-, and life is anything but "on hold." God sits with us, waiting.

Is Advent any different? It is most certainly a waiting period. We anticipate. We may also be anxious. We may be neutral. I feel all three during Advent. I am excited about holiday lights, the Christmas in East Liberty concert returning this year, and am looking forward to visiting my family in VA. I also dread cold weather, and feel anxious about not "doing enough" and the way time flies. I'm neutral about Hallmark movies. My goal this Advent is to recognize and celebrate that life is not "on hold" while we wait. Advent isn't just a build-up to Christmas.

Waiting time is God time, regardless of where our emotions are during Advent. God is with us on the overly-crowded PI, at a loved one's hospital bed, and at the PPG skating rink. And if I ask, I'm pretty sure God will take me out for a walk in the cold to look at lights.



A decorative illustration of a green branch with several red, teardrop-shaped flowers or buds, located in the top left corner of the page.

Waiting, what is the meaning of waiting? Why do I have to wait all the time? In Daniel 9:3, Daniel was banished into a lion's den. He prayed to God and waited. Instead of doubting God, Daniel sent a prayer and waited. God sent an angel to Daniel and saved him. Daniel believed in God and waited.

For me, it's hard to wait through the week. I always can't wait for it to be the weekend. Without weekdays, how good will weekends be? If we don't have bad things, the good things won't have any reason to be good. We sometimes need to learn from the boring and "stupid" things to get to the good things.





In my freshman year of high school, I wasn't so sure what I was expecting but one thing was for sure- a good and fresh start. On the first day of school there were a lot more people than I had expected it to be and everything went by pretty quickly. For the first couple of weeks in my new school it had felt uncomfortable. What made it uncomfortable wasn't just getting used to the schedule, as expected, but the amount of loneliness I had felt by being the only Spanish speaker. Why was this a problem? This "problem" was a bit uncomfortable since it had made me feel different, outcasted, and strange.

I kind of felt like Nina Rosario (played by Leslie Grace) from the movie/play "In the Heights". She is a second-generation Puerto Rican immigrant and first in her family to attend university. She had dropped out of the university she was attending because of how overwhelmed she felt in being obligated to be "perfect" and the joy and pride from her family and town.

When I first saw this movie, I had felt some sort of relation since I had felt the same way as this character.



I too am an immigrant and attending the school I was going to felt overwhelming since the idea of failing was the only thing I had feared the most. The idea of my own family being disappointed in me after a long time trying to get me to where I was felt like a living nightmare I kept on repeating everyday.

I do admit, I did feel way far from God even though I was attending a Catholic school, I had felt alone and ignored. I had hidden these feelings of loneliness and frustration. All I wanted was to wake up in a different place and possibly in a different life.

I had asked God and myself why I had felt like this starting now? Why did I feel like I was pushed to do my best when I was trying? Or even, when will all of this be over soon? I felt waking up with these questions floating on my head at any time of the day. I had felt tired all the time from school work and simply the gloomy mindset I was in all the time. I had thought about telling someone about it but I was afraid of being seen as being dramatic or overthinking things, so I decided to keep it to myself. It had felt like some sort of grey and sad cloud following me all day and getting bigger and bigger the more I held it in. I just wanted it to rain and explode already.

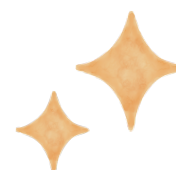
But when did all of this change and end? Over the summer when school had finished, I had joined an overnight week camp named, "Trinity Youth Conference". There I felt a bit anxious but I did feel slightly welcome on the first day since two of my friends were there with me. I could never have come up with a better thought that I would actually feel more than alive in there. If I had to describe it, it felt like breathing in air after being underwater for a long time. I wasn't treated like a kid, like how when your school's teacher thinks they know more than you or your opinion is less, I felt respected by people who were older than me. I really enjoyed the stars at night when I was there, it felt like seeing glowing bright pearls in the night sky. This is what I had been waiting for. A moment that had no feeling but being alive. That grey and gloomy cloud had started to rain upon me and that rain felt like I was being baptized once again. I had felt accepted in my own insecurities and imperfections I had. This was all because of the learning and teaching I had been taught, the people who were extremely friendly and kind to me, and the environment that made me feel closer towards mother nature and the beauty this world owns. I had finally escaped the mad world I was living in and had slept peacefully in one that felt warm.

Things did get better and things had changed for the greater good. I moved schools and had been accepted in one that is environmentally friendly. I do like my new school since I get to learn about nature and it made me realize what I might possibly want to do as a career. I do feel less lonely and less exhausted from school work and overwhelmingness. I may not know what new challenges the future holds or what may come but I hope I can hold on patiently.

Even when I had felt far away from God and my religion, I had still held on to it and kept in my faith. I didn't want a person, a thing, or maybe even a place to save me. I had needed God to help me, listen to me, and stay with me. I am so glad that my faith kept me going and stayed by my side. Even when I was alone and walked through my own path, I still held that faith in it as if it was a compass and guiding me through the way.

My beliefs in this are, to be patient even if it takes a long time. Things do get better sooner or later, whether you believe in a God or not- there is a small bit of faith that needs to be held in close to guide you. In the journey to find what we need it isn't that far, because the first step will always be the most

unexpected and of course, it will come in surprises. Whether we are looking for love, a solution, a sign, a person, or just something- patience and faith are your two friends you can always count on no matter what.



1 I will stand my watch And set myself on the  
rampart, And watch to see what He will say to  
me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

2 Then the Lord answered me and said: "Write  
the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he  
may run who reads it.


3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But  
at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though  
it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come,  
It will not tarry.





One time it was hard for me to wait was for me to be able to get the COVID vaccine. The person who helped me through it was my mom. She kept me updated on the vaccine status and my dad scheduled an appointment. My mom is the best and she helps me through a lot of waiting. The vaccine was very hard to wait for, and I am glad that I am able to get it now. I wonder what will come next...





During winter break of my senior year at Allegheny College, I received my driver's license. Yay! Then, my focus turned to getting a car. But I was a poor college student and my family could not afford to buy me a car -- let alone pay for my car insurance. Even with these barriers, I remained focused on getting a car. So, I started praying to God for favor (as I was taught growing up).

After I graduated from Allegheny College -- with still no car -- I went home to Hyattsville, MD and I started working for a temp agency. During one assignment at the Aspen Institute in DC, I applied for a job there after encouragement from the head of their Economic Opportunities Program. Eventually, I received the job and my thoughts turned to getting a car and car insurance!

As I started saving money for a down payment, I started researching car loans. I read that because I did not have a lot of established credit that I might need a

co-signer (I did have two credit cards, but I was not sure if that was enough to help get a car loan). Lord, another barrier (insert frustration emoji).

I was staying with my older sister and my brother-in-law when I returned to MD. I asked them about being co-signers (I knew they had great credit) and they said no. “God, why another barrier?” I started praying that God would make a way out of no way. One day, my brother-in-law told me that he and my sister talked and they were willing to co-sign for my car loan. Hallelujah! Maybe they took pity on me because I complained a lot about having to take the Metro everywhere or bum rides from them.

The day I went to get my car, my brother-in-law joined me at a local Saturn car dealership. After four hours that included picking out a car, test driving it, completing all of the paperwork (when they ran my credit information, I did not need a co-signer!!), and taking a picture with my new Saturn for the dealership (yes, Saturn had everyone do this when they purchased a new car), I rolled off the lot in my new 1997 Forest Green Saturn! Praise God!




God's favor came through for me big time! I had my Saturn until I graduated from grad school at Duquesne in 2004 -- truly a gift from God!

Many times, I have experienced God move in big ways in my life as I prayed and waited.



PEACE





Watching, waiting, anticipating  
Searching for freedom-a liberation.  
Time of reflection,  
Season of rejection.  
Keen awareness of disappointments.  
Deep longing for contentment.

Advent is a period of time  
When we look to have heaven and seek the sublime.  
Frivolous desires crowd our thoughts,  
But yearning lies within our hearts.  
Wonder struggles to find a perch,  
While seeking the light becomes our search.

Moving from darkness into the light;  
Wrestling hopes and dreams to find insight.  
Knowing and being known.  
Self revealing discovery now owned.  
God's intervention in human history  
Remains for us a creative mystery.

Pandemic restrictions and covid surges  
Brought many tears and some funeral dirges.  
But as Advent 2021 approaches  
We hope to sidestep the reproaches.  
Engaging in hopeful activities this season  
For which Christ's birth is truly the reason.

Take a moment to paus,  
While you await Santa Claus.  
And remember the One who is coming  
Do not think He was slumming  
When to earth and our small lives He came.  
Take time to lift and exalt His Name!





While I've never been particularly fond of rushing through life, waiting certainly presents its own challenges. It seems to waste time, a precious resource, while accomplishing little. But until March 2020, I had never felt the challenges of waiting as I do now -- in my flesh and bones. As a Covid Long-Hauler who got sick during the first wave of the pandemic, waiting for things to improve has been particularly difficult. It feels as though the future I had so painstakingly envisioned has been impatiently waiting to land on a runway that is neither ready nor visible.

But waiting, I'd argue, can strengthen one's faith. By meeting this period of prolonged waiting and uncertainty, rather than pushing it away or giving in to despair, I am learning to let go of control and instead to invite God to take the plane's yoke. At best, my attitude is that of an inexperienced co-pilot on a challenging flight toward an unknown destination. And given the stormy weather, questions have been swirling in my mind like a hurricane: What if I can't see the airport and crash during landing? What if lightning strikes the fuselage? What if the heavy hail damages the turbines? What if no one knows

that I'm up here in distress? What if the plane runs out of fuel?

I have asked these and many more questions during this unrelenting illness and pandemic. But despite all of my trepidation during this challenging flight, God keeps reassuring me that we are not exactly on an Earthly plane.


The destination airport is in fact equipped with cutting-edge radar technology that guides the plane safely during landing; the fuselage can disperse any electrical discharge back into the surrounding clouds; the turbines are so powerful that any hail simply melts upon contact; the traffic control tower knows my exact location and has been following the flight on the radar all along; and the fuel tank, I've found, is refilled by God's grace, mid-flight, as needed.

So while the heavy turbulence during this flight is very real, God, an experienced pilot and the creator of the very plane I'm on, keeps telling me that I can (and should!) take some time to rest and enjoy the views. There is so much magic and beauty to be seen from up here when I manage to let go of my yoke and relax my gaze. Despite the heavy storm,



occasional openings in the clouds reveal a breathtaking sky and bright rays of sunlight that warm my skin. I still don't know to which airport we'll be flying. I'm just not privy to the entire flight plan. I also don't know how much more turbulence is up ahead. But I do know that for as long as God is piloting this plane, I can trust Him to make all the right calls and bring us home safely. My part is to remain grateful for the journey.





In January of 2012 I had a hemorrhagic stroke. This kind of stroke occurs when a small artery ruptures and bleeds into the surrounding brain tissue, compressing it. While I was unconscious most of that first day, I remember arriving at UPMC Presbyterian and hearing the doctors debate about drilling a hole in my head to relieve the pressure. But after the initial tests and scans were completed and I was placed in intensive care, the real ordeal (and waiting) began.

Because blood and brain tissue do not play well together, I was subjected to the worst headaches I could ever imagine. They came in waves; starting out like a bad migraine, then doubling in intensity, and finally a level of pain beyond description. After a brief respite, they would begin again... the doctors explained that they could not risk giving me a narcotic to ease the pain, as it would also mask the signs of another stroke. So for the next several days, it was me and Tylenol, which did absolutely nothing.



There is no way to adequately describe what those days of waiting felt like. I remember on more than one occasion asking God to let me die. Each time the cycle of pain would start again, I honestly didn't think I could take it any longer. Visitors came and went, the nurses did their best, but it all seemed like a never-ending nightmare.

Gradually though, I began to be aware of not being alone. There was a definite presence sitting in one of the chairs, just out of my eyesight. This presence (God, Jesus, an angel?) remained with me while I waited for an end to my ordeal. And while the cycles of pain never relented, I began to feel like I might just somehow hold on.

Finally, after a few days, a doctor appeared and said narcotic pain medications would now be safe. A nurse started a morphine IV, and I slept for what seemed like days. When I awoke, the pain was gone... but so was the Presence.

As the years have gone by, I have pondered this experience. My initial thoughts were that the intense pain had cleared out all the other distractions, and I was then able to "see" what had always been with me. This Presence, this very real sense of not being

alone, had helped me to endure it. And while I still believe that, a deeper meaning has emerged... God did not strengthen me so “I” could endure the suffering, God suffered “with” me until the ordeal was over. A God who loves me enough to suffer with me is a God worth waiting for.





Waiting

Waiting is what we do

We wait for things to happen ,

We wait for the mail,

We wait to show that we are patient.

We wait

We wait for a sign

We wait for our prayers to be answered

We wait, knowing the outcome may not  
be what we prayed for

We wait, knowing, it is not just our  
concerns that are in the mix

We wait for those we love

We wait, again and again

Thinking, and hoping, that all will be  
well

We wait , on ourselves,

To get the courage to do something,

To gain the wisdom to make a decision

To live with our decisions, and fulfill our  
promises to ourselves and others.

Waiting is like listening  
Standing outside, just waiting for the calmness of the  
natural world , to enter inside of us,  
And to bring us to calmness.

We wait for our minds to settle down long enough  
To listen

And then we pass fifty, and sixty, and many of us become  
grandparents,  
And we ask ourselves,  
What are we waiting for

Stop waiting  
Try something new  
Take a class, learn a new musical instrument or foreign  
language

We wait for children to be born and we wait for the old  
and infirm to pass onto God in the next realm

Waiting is part of living  
And yet, it is so very hard

Oftentimes, we feel as if the wait will never end.  
Our patience is worn thin

We seek diversions:

Cooking, long walks, big projects like making a quilt or painting a room

As I near seventy, ( in the summer of 2022 ),  
I realize that some of my most creative times were  
when I was waiting,  
Especially for the birth of my three sons in the 1970's.

I made baby quilts,  
I painted rooms,  
I made oil paintings, lithographs, etchings, drawings.  
I prepared.  
I shopped for baby clothes.

Now, I get up early.  
I go outside at 5 or 6 a.m. to welcome the day.  
I thank God for another morning.  
I don't wait anymore.  
I just enjoy each day as it arrives and as it is finished.



24 For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

25 Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own;

26 for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.

27 And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment,

28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

10 PRECIOUS MINUTES I DIDN'T KNOW  
TIL THEN THAT I NEEDED OR WANTED  
JAN HERZER

*Date: 3/14/16, Time: 10:30pm*

*Canterbury Place*

My family and I are waiting for my precious Mum to breathe her last. It was a hard, long faithful journey, this is her time to go to God. I know this. We were all gathered with her in her room at Canterbury Place. She arrived at 8pm. Talk and time with her in the room with no response. She was still with us but well on her journey. About 9:45pm my brother ordered pizza for all of us. When it arrived, they all went to eat in the kitchen. I then realized that this would be my last time alone with my Mum. I stayed with her. Prayed with her. Cried, sang Taizé songs, held her hands till my knees ached so badly from kneeling on the floor next to her bed. I didn't know I needed or wanted this time till it was upon us.

I am so blessed for these precious 10 min with my Mum.

All through life we wait- for school to start, for Dad to come home from work, for dinner to be ready. And sometimes best of all we wait for rest.


When Mum got her cancer diagnosis we waited- waited to hear from doctors, from my Mum's own voice, for test results, to see if treatment worked. We waited. While we were at Canterbury Place with Mum to wait, I learned so many things about what she was doing and going through at that moment. God was ever present with us. I believe when a person is aging- God, Jesus are waiting to take them home.

In the very room where we sit- God was waiting for the same thing we were. For Mum to go to Him and be in heaven for all eternity. We (I) waited for/with my Mum for so many things. When Pastor Heather mentioned this “project” in church, the wait for my Mum to go to heaven was the first thing to come to mind. So many other wonderful times we waited- for new babies, for weddings, birthdays, and days of celebration. March 15, 2016 is a day that God called Mum home. It's been a tough road.



I now wait to see Mum and all others in heaven. I will wait and do the best I can, everyday, for our God Almighty- while I wait to go to Him!





No longer do I walk my

Journey mile

By mile, nor write my journal

Page by page.

I walk in Beauty step by step,

And write

Paragraph by slow paragraph

In prayer.

This is my present. What does the

Future hold?

Now may be pause on journey,

Catching breath

To cross the finish line, ms.

In hand.

Now may be step to slowing

To the point

Of window watching in the world, and more

Awareness in my six senses


Of only one

WORD.



LOVE





Víctor and I got married on a rainy Monday afternoon. It was the day that the stay-at-home order was put in place in Ohio. We were worried we wouldn't be able to get married if we waited till our wedding day. That's how long we have been waiting for a visa for him to be able to move from Mexico to the U.S. so that we can live together.

It is a different kind of waiting than I have ever experienced before. This waiting is chronic. It is heavy and vulnerable and lonely. This waiting is a constant reminder of how little control we have over our lives—that Víctor and I, like so many other families around the world, are separated by borders and bureaucratic mountain ranges that don't have the decency to mark their trails.

It's been nineteen months. It's been twelve plane rides. It's been hundreds of phone calls. It's been the endless

game of counting down the days to see each other, and then savoring each second once we're together.

I have asked God so many questions during these nineteen months. I have echoed the psalmist's lament—  
How long, O Lord? How long until I can be with the one I love?

How long will the government be able to control the most intimate parts of my life and future? How long must we live under the tyranny of xenophobia and American exceptionalism before God's reign breaks in and gathers all nations together as one community?

I often wonder, where is God in all this? And often, I don't have a satisfying answer to that question. Yet, somehow, I believe that God is present in the hope that perseveres—hope that one day Víctor and I will be together indefinitely, hope that one day the bureaucracy and borders will wash away, and hope that soon and very soon we will all stand as one people before God.





Not all stories have happy endings. After a long illness Mom decided to transition to hospice with nursing and family care at home. The final days, hours and minutes pass very slowly and give us time for reflection. Mom worked as a bookkeeper for a private Catholic High School. One of her dear friends was Sister Barb. She was so much more than a friend and helped us all through a very hard time. Mom entered into a coma on Saturday and by Sunday had started the "death rattle" - a unique breathing sound like gurgling that indicates the end of life. And so, we waited. We prayed. We comforted one another. We shared stories. Everyone at the house came in to say their good-byes and love giving Mom permission to let go, we would be okay. After 24 hours of the "death rattle" we were exhausted and our nerves frazzled.

Together, Sister Barb and I, looked at one another to realize we hadn't asked Christ to take Mom's soul. Quickly we searched for a bible so that we could bring

Christ to her bedside. We started with Psalm 23. Before we could finish two verses Mom's breath became quiet and sporadic. The body slowly gasping for air until her breath was no more. Maybe the body was just worn out but I will always feel that our prayer asking Christ to take her soul gave Mom the relief she needed to take her home. My father, who passed away years earlier, was a pilot. A short time after Mom's passing we talked to our neighbor who said a plane had passed over the house and she knew it was my father welcoming my Mom to his side. Precious moments like these only happen in the belief of life everlasting and Christ in us all.







“Just wait until I lose ten more pounds.”

“Just wait until she says those three little words.”

“Just wait until fall.”

“Just wait until next year.”

“Just wait until next week.”

“Just wait until vacation.”

“Just wait until I feel more brave.”

“Just wait until people start speaking in Truth and in Love.”

“Just wait until we all walk hand in hand.”

Just wait.

Just wait.

Just wait.

I can't wait any more.

I don't need to wait any more.

I have spent my life waiting.

And I can't wait any more.

And I don't need to wait any more.

Because I have finally figured out (most days)

That God is here now.

That the Christ is here now.

That the Spirit is now.

And those sometimes illusive-to-me-Three have always been here.

Love has always been here.

This moment is just the right weight, this moment has just the right words, this moment is the right season, it is the vacation, the brave moment.

People are speaking in Truth and Love; I just haven't been listening.

People are walking hand in and hand, I just haven't been watching.

*“In the beginning, there was the Word; the Word was in God's presence,*

*And the Word was God.*

*The Word was present to God*

*From the beginning.*

*Through the Word, all things came into being,*

*And part from the Word*

*Nothing came into being*


*That has come into being.*

*In the Word was life,*

*And the life was humanity's light-*

*A Light that shines in the darkness,*

*A Light that the darkness has never overtaken.”*

A decorative illustration of a branch with several red, teardrop-shaped flowers and green leaves, positioned in the top-left corner of the page.

Now I know that all the time I have spent waiting was unfortunate and unnecessary. My waiting made me cynical. My waiting made me hopeless. My waiting kept me from being grateful. My waiting kept me from acting in Truth and in Love.

No more waiting. No need to wait. The Christ is here.

The Christ has always been here. Love has always been right here.

And ever shall be.



On Valentine's Day 1997 my world changed forever. My dad had a stroke on February 13th and was on life support until I could drive from Maryland to North Carolina to say my last farewell. That was the longest drive I've ever made. God and I talked the entire four-hour long ride. Why didn't you make my dad give up smoking so he wouldn't get COPD? How could you take him away from me? Who was going to be my rock from now on? Why were my kids being denied growing up with the love from their granddad?

When I arrived at the hospital and walked into my dad's room, a certain comfort came over me. I told my stepmom that I wanted my dad to have final rites. As the priest said the scripture, I could feel my dad's spirit going to the light and I knew that he was with God and at peace. Early in the morning on Valentine's Day my waiting was over.



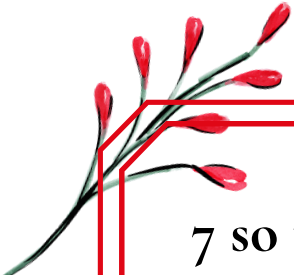
2 We always give thanks to God for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

3 constantly keeping in mind your work of faith and labor of love and perseverance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

4 knowing, brothers and sisters, beloved by God, His choice of you;

5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sakes.

6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word during great affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit,




7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place the news of your faith toward God has gone out, so that we have no need to say anything.

9 For they themselves report about us as to the kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is, Jesus who rescues us from the wrath to come.



“Wait, wait. Don't be too quick.” (p8, Noli me Tangere, by José Rizal)

I'm terrible at waiting for Christmas. This is not an overstatement. Each year around this season, I want nothing more than to begin giving and receiving Christmas gifts. The itch begins in October and increases as Christmas draws nearer. It's as though the days grow longer rather than shorter as I struggle to simply wait.

My inability to wait for Christmas began for me quite early. As a child I would find my Christmas presents as early as November. In my defense, gifts were routinely hidden in plain sight. As a parent who not-so-secretly wants my family to “accidentally find” their gifts, I now realize that maybe my parents also liked to give gifts early so as to rush Christmas forward. Perhaps my family, like most, is still learning what it means to wait. Perhaps my struggle with waiting is a struggle you can relate to, too?

Waiting for Christmas is one way the season asks us to be patient, and it's certainly an important one. This type of waiting requires a lot of willpower. Specifically, the willpower to delay (perhaps to tarry, in biblical terms) a surprise in order to make Christmas morning all the more special. But the gift we bring to Christmas really isn't the presents in our hands or under the tree, but rather ourselves. The boxes and bows we share are a reflection of this truth. When we give a gift we are giving of ourselves to show care for someone else. This is a wholly Christian (or perhaps holy human act).

Romans 8:19, 22-23a, says: "The (whole of) creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now..." (NRVS).

"The Children of God," this is everyone God loves. Therefore, creation is waiting for all of us to find the





moment to give of ourselves. Creation yearns for new growth like we yearn for new life, and new opportunities to serve others and be served for the sake of all.

Consider the trees that, by the beginning of Advent, have already lost their leaves as an image of creation awaiting new growth. "Have you ever noticed a tree standing naked against the sky? How beautiful it is? ...in its nakedness is a poem, a song. Every leaf is gone and it is waiting for spring." (a). The bare tree's 'poem for spring' is much like our anticipation for the birth of Christ. We wait for God's restorative love to spring forth on all humankind. The promise of spring arrives against the bitter cold of the winter months that bring the celebrations of Hanukkah and Christmas. God is made flesh in Christ to live with us and for us. And the justice reign of God begins for us, in our time and in our communities, with God at work in and through us and for all of creation.

This is Christmas' penultimate gift, and we get to take part in the giving, not just December 24th and 25th, but every day, all year long. Spring to spring, and winter to winter. This gift we give: our passions, time, prayers, presence, and our presents--one to another is worth waiting for.

a. (p118, Think on These Things, Krishnamurti)





JOY



During the Advent season when I was 17 years old, I was waiting for my father to get better.

But things were definitely not heading in that direction.

The day after Thanksgiving, my father was putting together a set of shelves that my mother had bought for the bathroom. As he leaned over to pick up a tool, he felt a painful spasm in his back and couldn't stand back up. We helped him into bed; he took some Tylenol and tried to get comfortable. Obviously, he had pulled a muscle, and some rest would help.

But it didn't. Over the next few days, he continued to experience severe pain, to the point where it was difficult for him to stand or walk. He developed a fever and slight nausea, not feeling like eating. The shelves sat unfinished, the Thanksgiving long weekend ended, my dad stayed home sick while my mother went back to work and my brothers and I returned to school.

Honestly, at first, we weren't worried about it. I was happy to be able to drive my father's old clunker car to high school while he wasn't using it, and besides, we were used to my father being sick. Stemming from medical problems he had had before we were born, he had experienced bad headaches and seizures throughout our lives. There were many evenings when we had to be quiet while he rested in a dark bedroom, head throbbing.

Yet the days wore on, and he was obviously feeling worse and worse. My mother took him to the hospital in Morgantown, about half an hour from our house, where they admitted him and started running some tests. I drove there after school to visit him, day after day, waiting. It was the holiday season. We needed to get this figured out, and prepare for Christmas.

After weeks of hospitalization, my father still had no diagnosis and was growing much worse. On the morning of Christmas Eve, as his fever stayed at 105 degrees and the doctors were still scratching their heads, he cried out in telling us how bad the pain was, even with medication. My mother, a nurse who had worked in emergency rooms, surgery, home health, and public health, realized this part of

the waiting had to be over. “You’re not helping him,” she said, and arranged for our close family friend, a funeral home director, to transport my father to a Pittsburgh hospital in his hearse.

Yeah, ironic. I know.

But I learned from my mother — right then, if she hadn’t taught me before — that while waiting is often necessary, sometimes you can’t just wait passively. You have to step onto the path while you wait. Prepare the way, I guess.

We arrived at St. Francis Hospital (where Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh now stands) on the evening of Christmas Eve. It definitely didn’t feel like Christmas. Oh, there were a few presents waiting to be unwrapped; my mother, with her hands full (obviously) had asked me to shop for my younger brothers and even for myself, so I knew what was in each and every package. I had bought myself a small silver and black onyx ring, and while I had been anxious to wear it when I picked it out, it was disheartening to know about all of one’s Christmas gifts. And it had become clear, given the medical staff’s reaction to my father’s condition upon arrival, that his life was definitely in danger.

They started running tests and trying to get his (very high) fever down. In a short time, they had at least identified a serious bladder infection that was contributing to the fever and begun to treat that. We went to get settled with some cousins in Blawnox and catch a few hours' sleep. Early the next morning, my mother and I drove back to the hospital, leaving my brothers to sleep and enjoy some time with our cousins, planning to have our own Christmas together later.

It was hard to wait, even through the drive from Blawnox to Bloomfield. We had checked with the hospital but didn't know much.

When we walked into my father's hospital room, he had no idea it was Christmas morning. I mean, how could one not lose track of time in this situation? In any event, after kisses hello and an attempt to assess his overall condition, my mother went into the corridor to talk with the nurses. "Susan," my dad said. "Listen, I'm going to be okay."

"Dad?" He'd been so incoherent recently with the pain and fever that it seemed kind of odd for him to even be speaking to me so directly and sensibly.



“Yes,” he said. “Listen. I’ve prayed about it all night, and I asked God to please let me be okay and to see all of my children graduate from high school. And I can feel, I just know, that it’s going to be okay.”

And it was. Mostly, the wait was over. We opened gifts in his hospital room that day, my father improved, and came home. He was diagnosed with something no one has ever heard of, but managed with medications. I was so grateful! and what he had said to me increased my faith immensely.

Now, when I think of my father and waiting, there are other images, like waiting again in a hospital several years later for him to come out of a coma. But he didn’t. Like the Israelites, we don’t always know, or want, what we’re waiting for. Most of them thought they would get a warrior-king, but they got Jesus, a teacher who asked us, most of all, to love one another. I wait now with the hope, not always easy to hold, that I will see my father again one day.

It doesn’t happen very often any more — I lost him many years ago now, when I was just 24 — but as I contemplated writing all of this down, I dreamed of him last night.

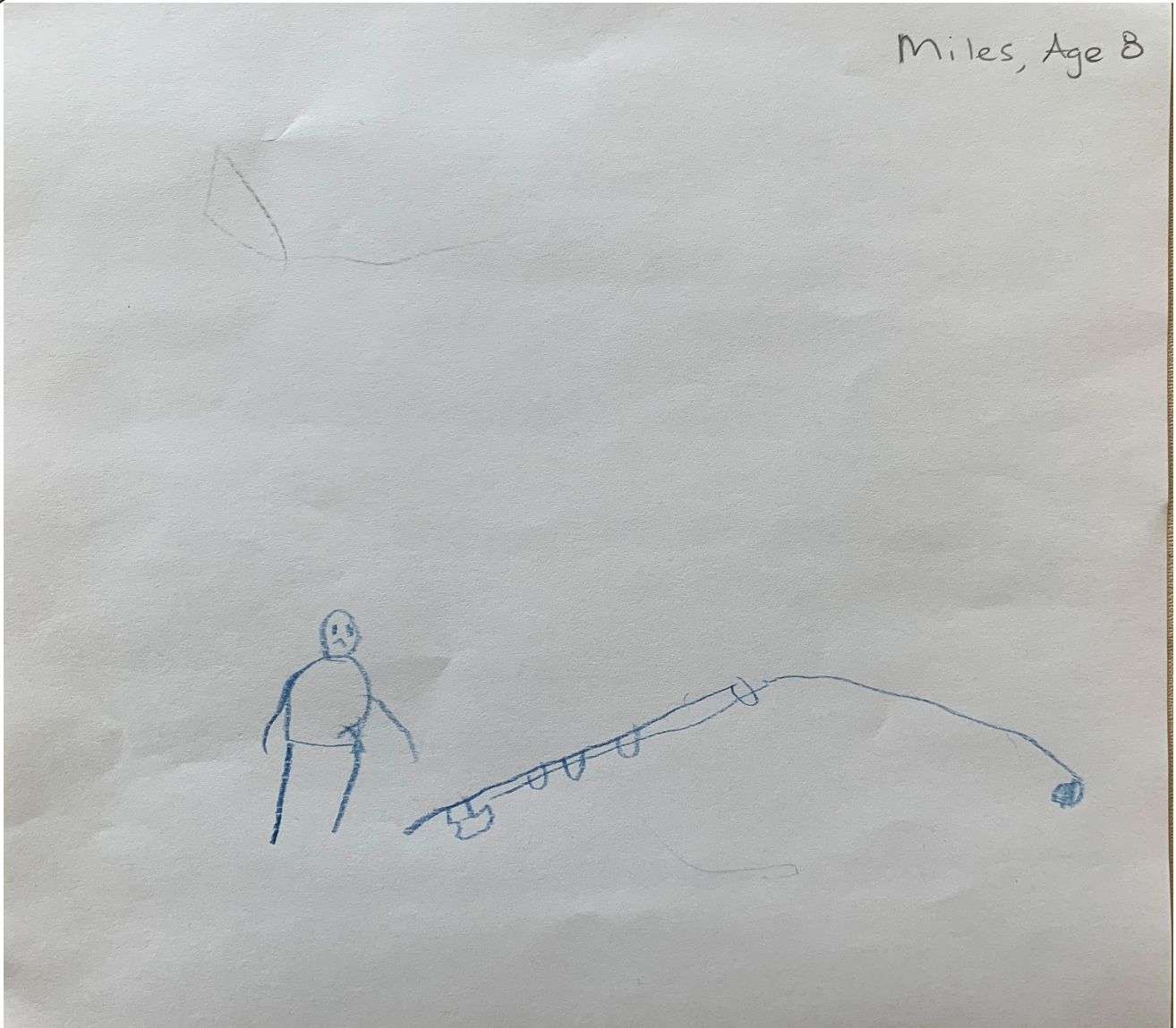


It was a simple image, him in my grandmother's kitchen, but he reached out for me and hugged me close as I worried about my daughter, telling me to wait. And everything would, somehow, be all right.



DECEMBER 22


MILES





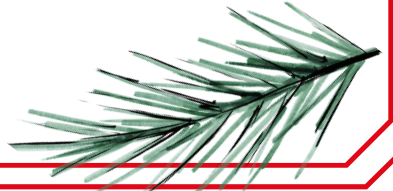
miles, Age 8





*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth the Christ, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem . . . Galatians 4:4*

Quietness has seemed an Advent tradition in my life but not in any formalized way. My childhood home had a wood-burning fireplace. During cold snowy December days we'd use it during or after dinners. I'd start and tend the fire - what child doesn't like to play with fire? Pulling back the screen, poking the wood around, watching the sparks fly up the chimney, stoking it as much as was allowed. It was impressed upon me that I'd also have to stay up until the fire died out, especially since our Christmas tree was adjacent to the fireplace. This required waiting and watching until very late (or very early) through the darkness, so that the embers could be spread out. Who knew what time this would happen? And what




kid doesn't like to stay up to all hours in the night?

In retrospect, Advent for me wasn't waiting for the light to come, but rather waiting for the light to die out! There was deep peace. I am very grateful for my mother and grandmother, two women who worked together to create a sanctuary of love, acceptance, and quietness. Nothing compares with sitting in quietness with church members in the sanctuary pondering the unparalleled freedom and depth of the love given in Christ for our deepest hurts and shame. The morning comes and brings a new day.

*Prayer: May we tend our fires carefully and provide a loving place at ELPC for all to sit together in quietness during this Advent season and throughout the year.*





A fruit of the Spirit which is not fully ripe for me is patience. Life in the time of COVID calls for more patience than I was prepared for. The fact that so many folks talk about returning to “normal,” whatever that means to them, and perhaps try to do so prematurely, seems to show that I am not the only one who needs to develop this spiritual gift.

Life in the time of COVID calls for infinite patience, it means waiting for so many things which previously could be taken for granted. Initially we were shopping for groceries online and picking up at the store. Just getting a slot took time, and navigating the hastily developed store software to order, was equally trying. But we were grateful to be able to buy food and not be exposed. As we saw the many people spending time in their cars in a line which seemed to stretch for a mile or more to pick up food, not of their choice from the Food Bank, I became more and more grateful for what we had.

All of us waited for the vaccine rollout. Even though it was at “warp speed,” we felt like children waiting for Christmas. As we waited, we saw the horrific scenes at hospitals and morgues, there were so many for whom the vaccine came too late. For us every day has been a gift.

We waited for children to be able to go to school again. When the schools went to virtual spring of 2020, I wondered how long it would be before the children could return, just like so many parents did. A friend, who is a medical doctor, told me that they would not be back that year. This seemed unimaginable at the time, but she was right. Our daughter was able to work from home. Nurses, grocery store clerks and others had to face the risk every workday. Again, I was grateful we were protected.

The hardest part was waiting to see any family members out of state. Since our grandchildren and great nephews were too young for the vaccine, we had to make do with FaceTime and Zoom to keep in touch.

Many adults are tired of virtual, and I know my son must be tired of chasing two little boys around the house trying to keep them in camera range.

We got a respite November 10th. Gail, my sister, who had like us, gotten boosted, decided after giving it some time, to make the two-day drive from Birmingham to Pittsburgh to see us. Being able to see this gift coming made the waiting easier, in fact, anticipatory. I cannot describe the feeling as I saw her car pull up and ran outside. We hugged, laughed, and cried in the middle of the street. It had been two years, God truly amazed me. Worth the wait!







A sleepless, restless, very dark night ~ waiting for  
comfort.

God sent the golden dawn.

Ice, bitter wind and snow ~ waiting for a beloved  
traveler.

Headlights in the driveway ~ God sent guardian angels.

At the hospital consumed with anxiety filled waiting.  
God sent a surgeon with a reassuring smile.

The world waiting for love, for light and for life.  
God sent His Son.

