

Kirby Lawrence Hill  
November 30, 2014  
Isaiah 64:1-9  
1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church  
First Sunday of Advent  
WAITING FOR THE REVELATION

Almost twenty five years ago, there were a number of places described in the children's poem book by Dr. Seuss, Oh, The Places You'll Go. One of them is what is called the waiting place:

*Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come,  
or a plane to go or the mail to come,  
or the rain to go or the phone to ring,  
or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No  
or waiting for their hair to grow.  
Everyone is just waiting.  
Waiting for the fish to bite  
or waiting for wind to fly a kite  
or waiting around for Friday night  
or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake  
or a pot to boil, or a better break  
or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants  
or a wig with curls, or another chance.  
Everyone is just waiting.<sup>1</sup>*

Or here would be a version for those slightly older than Dr. Seuss' normal audience that I would offer today:

Waiting for the turkey to be done and waiting for the family to be at one;  
Waiting for the chores to be through and still waiting for Uncle Jake to ask, "Can I help too?"  
Waiting for that loved one to say, "Yes," or just waiting for a heart-felt caress;  
Waiting also for the epidemic's end, waiting for a more positive career trend;  
Waiting for cancer's cure, waiting for motives that are pure, waiting for politics that don't smell like manure,  
Everyone is just waiting.  
Waiting for hunger to be addressed, waiting for stress to get unstressed, waiting for life to be full of zest,  
Waiting for gaps of achievement and opportunity to be un-gapped, waiting for the flow of justice to be untapped,  
Waiting for enemies that become friends, waiting for peace that never ends,  
Everyone is just waiting.

Well, Dr. Seuss, I am not. And yet whether it is described in poetry or prose, we frequently find ourselves in the waiting place. At times the One on whom we are waiting is God. And much of the biblical story frankly involves stories of waiting. Abram and Sarai are left expecting the birth of a little one for a long time. Jacob's struggles with family issues get extended through a large part of the Book of Genesis. Joseph is sold into slavery and has an lengthy journey to freedom and eventual reconciliation with his family. The descendants of Israel are held in slavery for generations until God calls and enables Moses to demand their freedom. They then are in the wilderness for forty years more before they get to enter the Promised Land. They longingly wait for effective leadership and they wait to be safe from

enemies around them. When taken into captivity they wait for release and they wait for a temple and for a stable society to be built and rebuilt. The Hebrew people wait and wait for a messiah to come and deliver them.

At a time when the stores and much within our society and even much within us says, "Don't wait," we have entered a season which has as part of its purpose to train us in waiting. It is called Advent and it is a season of waiting. We tend to buck against waiting and there are few who fondly think it is a believer's job to wait for God. But when God is the Prime One who takes the initiative, it seems like there is a need for God's people to learn that God is not the Cosmic Bellhop. We need to learn how to wait.

Isaiah longs for God to tear open the heavens and come down. The Corinthian church is urged to wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Waiting can be a place to figure out what we control and what we don't. It can be a place to figure out what is important and what is less so. Waiting can be a spiritual, counter-cultural place where the divine potter reshapes us while we are spinning on the wheel.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor, who had been imprisoned by the Nazis, wrote a letter before Christmas in 1943, in which he said, "Life in a prison cell reminds me a great deal of Advent. One waits and hopes and putters around but in the end what we do is of little consequence. The door is shut, and it can only be opened from the outside."<sup>2</sup>

Let us not only wait for the days to go by. Let us be intentional about waiting for God. That doesn't mean we can't do anything during our time of waiting, but it does mean we can't do everything immediately. Perhaps the waiting could actually have a positive effect upon us.

That is what it did for Nelson Mandela who spent 27 years - 10,000 days - as a political prisoner in South Africa. During the time of his waiting, a revolution of discontent with the apartheid policies was brewing within and beyond his country. Twenty-seven years of waiting and wondering, 10,000 nights of loneliness and separation. But in that waiting place, at least for Mandela, strength and focus, vision and determination were forged, so that when the apartheid system fell, he had been prepared to preside over a free nation. He wrote, "It was during those long and hungry years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. When I walked out of prison, I knew my mission to liberate the oppressor and the oppressed."<sup>3</sup>

Advent is not 27 years long, although to the children it may feel like it is. This year, the Advent season is 25 days long. To be in a place of waiting is generally not a comfortable place to be. Yet our waiting can be filled with hope instead of with dread. It can be filled with purpose instead of anxiety. It can be filled with love instead of with indifference.

Will you readily wait during this season of waiting? Will you willingly allow God to shape you during this waiting time? It is a time for us to hone our vision of for what and for whom we are waiting. We can pray while we wait. We can sing while we wait. We can give of ourselves while we wait. We can even write a poem while we wait. There will be those who refuse to enter this season of waiting. But be assured, that there is One for whom the wait is definitely worth it.

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Seuss, Oh, The Places You'll Go, Random House, 1990.

<sup>2</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, Fortress, 2010.

<sup>3</sup>Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom, New York: Little Brown & Company, 1994, p. 64.