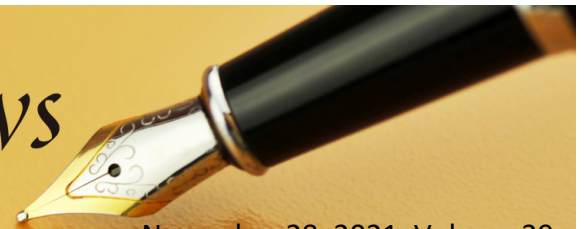


Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



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Waiting

In Dr. Seuss' *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, an explorer journeys through the twists and turns of life. This little book is an engaging read, often given as a graduation gift. It's known for its inspirational message—until the page where Dr. Seuss introduces “a most useless place” called “The Waiting Place,” “a place for people just waiting...for a train to go...or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow.” You get caught up in the melodic cadence of Dr. Seuss' rhyming words here, but pause for a moment when you turn the page and the story continues: *No! That's not for you! Somehow, you'll escape all that waiting and staying. You'll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing. With banner flip-flapping once more you'll ride high...*

Like most people in our culture, Dr. Seuss assumes that waiting time is unproductive—something to be avoided or gotten through as quickly as possible. The good parts of life are found on the other side of waiting time. We are programmed to do more, or be better or faster, as we rush from one place to another, checking things off our list. Minimizing the time we spend waiting means we can spend more time on the things that really matter...or does it?

As people of faith, we are enfolded in God's story, which tells us that *striving for our culture's version of success is not the only way to live*. Instead, our ancestors in faith and our own experiences tell us that some of life's richness and depth can be found precisely in the waiting places. This is good news, since we spend much of life waiting for one thing or another, from the mundane to the life-altering. We wait in line at the grocery store, and we wait for news of a diagnosis. If these waiting times are just something to plod through while we anxiously anticipate the real stuff of life, we are missing something.

Consider the season of Advent, a beautiful and mysterious time of expectation woven into our church year. As the days grow shorter in the northern hemisphere, we are given four Sundays to wait for the promised Messiah who will be born in time and will come again at the end of time. Some people don't care for Advent; they find it depressing to hear hymns in minor keys and Luke's warnings of signs that will be in sun, moon, and the stars. Waiting is hard, and a month of hearing about things we really can't wrap our minds around can be even harder. Rather than wading through troubling predictions and uncertain events, it is more pleasant to skip right to singing “Silent Night” on Christmas Eve as we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

And yet, Mary the mother of our Lord, tells us otherwise. There are gifts to be found in the liminal spaces of waiting and not knowing. It took time for Jesus to grow and develop, until he was ready to be born into this world. Mary waited for his birth just as her ancestors awaited the fulfillment of God's promises. For Mary, those who came before her, and for us, times of waiting can be times of turning God's promises of presence, sustenance, and justice over in our hearts and minds.

In the uncertain times in which we live, we don't know exactly how God will meet us in our joy or sorrow or fear—*only that He will keep His promise to do so*. When we don't know what's coming next, we might wait with hope or fear, expectation, or joy for God to work in and through and even in spite of us. As God meets us, the waiting time itself can become transformative and holy.

This is what we prepare to celebrate during Advent. As much as we celebrate Jesus' birth, we also celebrate the waiting, for God does, indeed, meet us here. No offense to Dr. Seuss, but the waiting place is not a most useless place at all. It can become a place where Emmanuel, God-with-us, comes to be by our side, as we look for glimpses of God's promises fulfilled. Here, God will help us, in remembrance of His great mercy, according to the promise He made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Adapted from *Gather*, December 2019