While We Wait
Psalm 122

Do you remember what it was like to wait for Christmas as a child? Do you remember that feeling that it would never get here, and even the slight tinge of dread that it would get here too soon, and would too quickly be over? Perhaps you had friends who would decorate for Christmas first, and you watched in jealousy as their tree and their wreaths went up while your house remained dreadfully bare of holly and evergreen.

As we get older, the ache of waiting for Christmas takes on a different form. Some still wait for Christmas with that childish excitement; the ones who have their lights and trees up and ready well before December, sometimes even before November. For others, the ache of waiting has taken on the form of anxiety: will Christmas be good enough this year? Will I buy the best presents, throw the best party, cook the best meal? Still in others the ache of waiting has grown into dread: how will I pay for Christmas this year? How will I get through another holiday without him or her? Or *with* him or her? How can I do all that needs to be done before Christmas? And still in others the ache of waiting has become indifference: maybe we just won't decorate for Christmas this year. Does it really matter? And in others still the ache of waiting has become anger: it's ridiculous, these stores putting out their Christmas merchandise so early now. Christmas used to mean something, now it's just a way to make money. We're only feeding the entitlement of the next generation.

Waiting can take on any or all of these forms: excitement, anxiety, dread, indifference, anger and more. We wait with hope, we wait with despair, we wait patiently or impatiently, we wait enthusiastically or apathetically, we wait earnestly or disinterestedly, we wait solemnly or cheerfully, we wait…

Like it or not, waiting will always be a part of our lives.

I will never forget waiting for the birth of my children. Both of my children went past their due date- my second born was more than two weeks past the due date when they medically induced labor in my wife! In both cases, we had done everything we could to prepare ourselves for the arrival of a baby, but in those final hours, there was little more for me to do than wait.

And now we are in the season of waiting for the birth of another child, the Christ child. We gather together because we know that he has already been born. We gather together because he is this day born in our hearts anew. We gather together because we know that his new-birth is imminent. We gather together and we wait. Even though we spend much of our lives waiting- waiting for Christmas and birthdays, waiting for the doctor or mechanic or the DMV, waiting to welcome home or be welcomed home, waiting for births and deaths, waiting for good news or bad- still we struggle to wait.

So, we turn to scripture, hoping it will teach us how to wait. And it does, the only way scripture can: through prayer.

The psalms are our original prayer book. It is where we go to learn to pray. I encourage you to bring yourself, your life's experiences, to the psalms. It has been described as the most human of books in the Bible; it is the one that most readily and easily speaks to the human experience: joy and pain, faith and fear, celebration and defeat, health and sickness. If we open ourselves to the psalms, to praying the psalms, then we will find ourselves drawn into a deeper relationship with our Lord.

Psalm 122 is one of what's called the Psalms of Ascent, prayers that are prayed as pilgrims make their journey to Jerusalem, to the Temple there. It is a prayer about movement, about going home, about going

to the House of the Lord. It is a prayer of waiting, looking forward to the final destination but knowing you're not there yet.

In that way, it is appropriate as our Advent prayer. We are on a journey towards a final destination, our Kingdom Home, the House of the Lord. We pray, as the psalmist did, "Our feet are standing in your gates…" we're right on the cusp, so close. (Verse 2)

As the psalmist draws near to his destination, he is moved to pray for the wellbeing of others on this journey with him. Jerusalem, or New Jerusalem, is "a city joined together in unity," therefore he- and we- pray for all the tribes of the Lord, all who hear the word of the Lord, all who will stand before God's judgment throne, to be united in worshipping God. The psalmist- and we- pray that God will receive the glory and all will know the Lord in truth and love and mercy.

This psalm then moves to praying, "For the sake of my family and friends," and "For the sake of the LORD our God's house," a prayer for peace and good. We are hardly alone in our life's journey. Every day our lives touch the lives of others, sometimes like the barest breeze and sometimes like a linebacker. We ought to pray for all we come across, our friends and family, our church family, the strangers we cross paths with, and even our enemies.

At this time of year, as we anxiously await Christmas in whatever form our waiting takes, let us wait in prayer, and let us pray for one another. Let us pray for peace and for good for our families and friends, for our church, and for all the tribes of this world, for we will one day, all of us, stand before God's throne.

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