

**Advent 2009 -All Earth Is Waiting**  
**Waiting 11-29-09**  
By Mary Jane Button-Harrison

**Jeremiah 33:14-16**

**The Righteous Branch and the Covenant with David**

14 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>15</sup>In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup>In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

We are part a culture that doesn't like waiting. And I must admit I am very much a product of the culture. Do you remember dial-up internet connection? Some of you may still have it, but once you get used to the speed of broadband or other high speed connection, it is hard to wait. You just sit there staring at the computer screen and wonder how it could possibly take so long to process your information. And, thanks to the internet, with a good connection, we don't have to wait for information. With Google and other search engines around, we can often get instant answers to many questions. Then with cell phones

and Facebook and Twitter and other such tools, we don't even have to wait until we get home tell someone how our day went or what we're doing. For good or for ill, we can communicate what's on our mind instantly. Recently, I was in a workshop with a Psycho-therapist who is very concerned about the future in a world that can't seem to wait for anything. He's worried we are losing our collective ability to be patient and to wait for things that need time to develop; like relationships. He worries that we are losing a basic understanding of the old adage, "Good things come to those who wait."

We keep inventing new ways to cut down on the amount of time we have to wait. Yet despite all the technological advances, we still seem to find ourselves waiting. Waiting in line at the self-checkout station at the grocery store designed to eliminate the waiting; waiting to talk to a customer service representative about a problem we're having with the time saving machine we bought; waiting for the package to come with the book on how to manage our time; waiting at the restaurant for our food to come in order to get to that evening activity

that made it impossible to have time to eat at home. Researchers tell us that the average person will spend 5 years of his or her life waiting in line, 2 years playing telephone tag, and six months sitting at red lights. That is over 7 and a half years of waiting, at best doing nothing, or at worst experiencing great aggravation! The bottom line is that even in our fast-paced world, with postmodern conveniences, we are all waiting for something. What are you waiting for?

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. And the first Sunday in Advent is the first day of the new year from a Christian standpoint. Advent begins the church year, but it is not a season of celebration, but rather a season of anticipation; of waiting; of watching; of preparing. "What are we waiting?" you may ask. Jesus was already born. Can't we just celebrate and skip the waiting part? Well, the holy waiting of Advent is meant to interrupt the busyness of our lives, and the pace of ordinary time in such a way that we remember and connect with the promises of God, fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, and yet, just like the people of old, we still live in times when God's reign is so very

clearly not established on earth as it is in heaven. We find ourselves in a world and in times when there are still those who go hungry and must wait for food. There are still those who, for a variety of reasons, find themselves in harm's way surrounded by hatred and violence, who wait for peace. There are still those, like several who came here for Thanksgiving dinner, who have no home and little hope who wait for affordable housing. There is still pollution and misuse of God's creation and, it seems all earth is waiting for healing and new birth. We know every time we read the newspaper or turn on the television that God's reign of love and justice and righteousness has not fully taken hold. And so we begin the Christian year with a season of waiting and anticipating and longing and feeling how much we need God to be born anew in us that we might see the vision of the prophet Jeremiah of "the days ...surely coming" when a righteous Branch will spring up for David; when those who lead will conduct themselves in accordance with God's purposes, and hunger and greed and hatred will be no more.

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise," Jeremiah told a people in the midst of exile and destruction of their holy city. Despair was common as people faced leaving or watching destroyed the places they had known and loved. Oh, how they longed for God to come and restore things to the time of the Great King David. They once again needed a great king to rule with righteousness uniting the kingdom, bringing peace to the land, and making their world a better place. But there was little sign of any such thing. And so despair came knocking. One commentator wrote, "Humans need despair when they cannot imagine God's promised alternative future." Jeremiah stepped in to remind Israel of their alternative promised future. "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made..., and I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David." God will be present with us and birth a new creation. And so Israel waited for a future that seemed impossible by all signs they could see.

At Christmas we celebrate the fulfillment of the promise that God would send one to usher in a new world; a new way of being, just as the prophets foretold. But despite what the stores tell us, it is not yet Christmas, it is Advent. It is a time of expectancy, of waiting, of telling it like it is, that though Jesus was born and though the world did change, God's presence must be born again and again among us and in us until at last the fulfillment will be complete and that alternative future here. But for now, we wait in hope for a future that seems impossible by all the signs we can see. For now, we wait with longing and anticipation to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Advent waiting is a discipline for people of faith. It is a time when we slow down and take a look at our own lives and the world and allow ourselves to experience longing - deep longing for things to be right, healed, whole, including our own hearts and lives. Advent waiting is a time to clear out the clutter and the noise and to get our priorities straight. It's not unlike when you wait for the birth of a baby or for

the shoots of spring. The time of waiting and watching and preparing is necessary in order to fully receive what is to come.

Advent waiting requires a couple of things - patience and a long view. Peter Steinke, the Psycho-therapist I told you about earlier, may be right, that as a society we are losing our collective ability to wait and to be patient as important things, like relationships and God's purposes, develop. The waiting of Advent takes patience and nurturing a long view, trusting that God is at work whether or not we see the signs, and trusting that God's vision for the world is worthy of our best hope and our best attention.

As we begin Advent, I would invite you to take some time each day to wait in silence; maybe you need to start with 5 or 10 minutes, or maybe you'd be happy with 30. But whatever the amount of time you choose, just wait and listen. Don't come to God in the silence with a wish list, instead, work on emptying the noise of your head and your life and wait for God to be born in you; wait for God's vision of heaven on earth to find room in your heart and your imagination. "For the days

are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promises I made." In Advent we cry out "Come, Lord Jesus, Come; Come, be with us, Emmanuel!" We expect you. We are waiting. Come rule with peace and justice and righteousness that all earth may see your goodness and your glory. Amen.