

TEXT: Lectionary
THEME: The face of God will be revealed
SUBJECT: The hidden God
TITLE: Wait

First Sunday of Advent
03 December 2017
Messiah Moravian
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On December 31, 1975, Gary Schneider (16), Randy Knapp (19) and Matt Meacham (16) set out to climb Mount Hood in Oregon. On the fourth day of the climb at about 9,000 feet, the mountain was wrapped in a howling snow storm that was to last for thirteen days.

They dug a snow cave where they waited for the next eleven days. They ran out of fuel for their stove, their sleeping bags were lumpy and wet, their food supply dwindled to a daily ration of two spoonfuls of pancake batter apiece. All they could do was wait.

On the sixteenth day the weather cleared and the boys crawled out of the snow cave. They were weak and could only manage a few steps at a time. Latter that day they caught sight of a rescue party.

This is a good image of Advent. Advent is seeing no way out and the only hope of rescue - and being rescued is the only hope - lies with powers beyond our control. Advent is about waiting for what can only come from God.

A couple from the mid-west were only able to have one child. They were thrilled when there daughter was born. They gave her all the love any child could hope for. They invested, sacrificially, much time and money in her education. They provided her with all she needed to grow into a smart, well rounded, cultured young woman. With the loving support of her parents, the young woman excelled at everything she attempted.

A time came, as it comes in most people's lives, when she decided to test her freedom. She pursued interests that worried her parents. She spent time with people whose investment in living creatively and responsibly was minimal. Before long she left her parent's home and wandered into the far country.

For a long time, a desperately long time, the parents did not know where she was. They would hear rumors and chase them down only to be left winded and disappointed. Their daughter had turned her back on them and was living in a self-destructive way.

When all you can do is wait, when tears are your bread and bowls of tears your only drink, you know something of the experience of the Psalmist. If your agony is public as well as private, you may also know the derision of your neighbors and the scornful laughter of your enemies. When all you can do is ask God "How long must I wait, must I endure?" then you know the experience of the Psalmist.

You also know something of the experience of the people Isaiah addresses. “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence.” There is a subtle but significant difference between the lament of the Psalmist and the lament of the prophet. The Psalmist believes God has hidden his face from the people *because* of their sin; the prophet believes the people have sinned *because* God has hidden his face from them.

Job was innocent, yet God remained hidden. Job stands as a caution against the too easy conclusion that the hiddenness of God is caused by our sin. Waiting for the revelation of God in the face of innocent suffering is excruciating. It is like being forgotten by your father, like your mother no longer cares.

Suffering, innocent or not, leads many to conclude that God’s hiddenness means he does not care or does not exist. What is left but to despair or to strike out, to give up on life or to resort to violence. The third way is to wait. Yet, how do we know when waiting is pregnant with new life and when it is justice delayed, justice denied?

Learning to wait is always painful for it involves a stripping away of unreal expectations and selfish demands and yet, at the same time, a deepening and sharpening of desire. Darkness and waiting sharpen desire. It takes considerable patience and trust to believe in patient waiting, in a meditative doing nothing.

Often meaning lies in the very waiting. We may have to wait until all kinds of inner and outer factors are in appropriate relationship. Sometimes we can do no more than sit with the desire and the obstacles and wait for the meaning.

To wait was all the parents of the promising young woman could do. Before long she was trapped, imprisoned by her choices with no way out. She exhausted her resources, both material and spiritual. She had no energy nor will to carry on.

At the end of her rope, the young woman called home. When her mother answered the phone she heard, “I know I turned my back on you and on all you live for. I know I haven’t done anything to deserve your favor, but you are my parents, you are the only hope I have.”

This is the phone call the prophet makes on behalf of the people of Israel. The people are trapped in hunger and loneliness, not knowing what lies ahead. They have returned from Babylonian exile only to find their homeland in ruins. The prophet cries “We are still your children, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are the work of your hands, do not abandon us forever.”

Advent is waiting for what can only come from God. Waiting for the hidden God to be revealed is the work of Advent. In an age of instant gratification of most desires, this waiting teaches us to discern what is futile, what is false, and what will bring us happiness, what will bring us joy. This waiting reveals a larger desire: to see the face of God.