

What Are You Waiting For?

We are now traveling through the season of the church year which we Christians call “Advent.” The term literally means “coming,” and what we know is coming, is the birthday of Jesus. Individual Christians fill this time of waiting for the birth day in a variety of ways – from the sublime (for example, caring for those less privileged than ourselves) to the ridiculous (how about those inflatable lawn decorations??)

But we sometimes feel that all the preparation, all the festivities, all the decorations, and all the gift-swapping tend to distract us from what we perhaps, by rights, should be most closely focusing on ... the waiting for what will come. Waiting is something we’re not very good at. We are a culture that values a no-nonsense, get-the-job-done kind of mentality. We don’t like to wait. But this season invites us, we think, to stop and reconsider what our busy-ness really accomplishes. This season invites us to speculate about what is still missing ... about what we would like to see still come into our lives. Busy as our lives are, what are we still hoping to make room for? What are we waiting for? What might we need that can come to us, not by our own efforts, but only of its own volition, and at its appointed time?

Several decades ago, a survivor of World War II came to the United States. He had been conscripted into Hitler’s army as a very young man, but had escaped and joined the resistance forces. He had wanted to be a composer before the war broke out. But after the war was over, the stress and the trauma of his experiences seemed to drive his musical creativity away. He fought against recurrent depression and flashbacks from his war days.

One day, in an effort to come to grips with his difficult memories and his unfocussed career, he sat down to consider whether there had ever been a moment when we human beings had been offered the opportunity to live without strife. The idea struck him that there was such a time. Then, he quickly took up pen and paper and wrote a poem about the first Christmas. The poem eventually became the best-selling carol, “Do You Hear What I Hear?” Apparently, when the carol was first played on the radio, its message gripped listeners in powerful ways. People who heard it first on their car radios reported pulling off the road to listen. Shepherds and kings, stars and little lambs may be the standard fare of Christmas carols, and this carol includes them, too. But this carol captured their place in the events of the wondrous night in a fresh way. The carol asked its listeners to put themselves in the role of those participants of the first Christmas. It asked that we listen, as those first Christmas characters had to listen. It asked that we hush the busy-ness, that we still our voices and our hands and our lives long enough to realize that we all are waiting for something.

What are you waiting for? We hope you will allow enough quiet in this season to listen as you wait. We hope in the stillness that it is born anew for you.