

WANDERING AND WAITING FOR WONDER

The key to a wonderful
life is to never stop
wandering into wonder.



Scripture:

Isaiah 64:1-4

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—²as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil— to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence!³When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.⁴From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus,⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



As we heard in the first reading, Isaiah taught his audience to wait for the Lord. And the apostle Paul often mentions waiting for the revelation of Jesus.

Waiting is hard! I don't know anyone who looks forward to having to wait for things. Think of when you have had difficulty waiting. A few difficult waiting

times for me in my life have been during pregnancy. It gets especially hard towards the end of the pregnancy to wait for the baby to finally emerge!

Another waiting time that has been especially hard is waiting for my son to return home from deployment. Every day he is “out there” feels like a week or more!

WAITING

Who here has ever been a waiter? It is a hard job. There is a lot of waiting in a job as a waiter. When you wait tables, you wait for your guests to decide what to order, then wait for the cook to prepare it, then wait longer for the people to eat it and then you wait to see what kind of tip you receive for all your good work waiting on them

There can be suffering in the waiting, like waiting for a cancer diagnosis or waiting for justice to be done, like the women and men who suffered harassment for many years. They need to just call it harassment. It is based on disrespect.

OUR CULTURE OF IMPATIENCE

Waiting in general is not easy. We live in a culture of impatience and an expectation for instant gratification. The internet inspires short attention spans and impatience levels are getting shorter as well. Thus people become easily irritated and road rage is happening more often. Our behavior while we patiently or impatiently wait for things is especially important in the sight of God. “He knows when you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake!”

That is why Paul was telling the church members in this first letter to the church in Corinth that they must be strong to the end. He is encouraging them to be patient and wait and watch for Jesus to be revealed to them.

THE SEASON OF ADVENT

What exactly were they waiting for? The season of Advent is about patient

expectation, about waiting and watching for the wonder of Christ.

What about Jesus Christ are we waiting for? Are we waiting for the empty manger to be filled with a baby? Yes, that is worth waiting for. It is good to remember that the birth of our Prince of Peace was a humble gift from God to our world. It is definitely worth celebrating every year!

This season of Advent is about waiting and watching and wondering and also expecting to see Jesus among us, right now.

We have wandered through another year, dealing with the ups and downs in life, and now we come around again to Advent and wait in expectation of the wonder of Jesus to be revealed in our midst.

**We are challenged to ponder:
where does Jesus arrive breaking
through time and space to be
present in our lives and in the
lives of others now, today?
Where can we see and where can
we be his hands and feet to give
a sense of wonder and hope
to this chaotic world?**

A MORE DIVIDED NATION

As a nation we are becoming more and more impatient and more divided than we have ever been in my lifetime. But we are empowered by God to reverse that trend and reach out beyond the boundaries of politics and wealth and be Christ-like to one another.

IT'S DIFFERENT THIS YEAR

This Advent and Christmas is definitely different than any we have experienced before here in and around Sonoma County. We have so many friends and church family members who are still mourning deep, deep losses and life transitions caused by the fires. How will we cope? How do we get the

energy to celebrate this season when we are still recovering from trauma?

God will strengthen us to the end. We can trust in that. Paul promises that we were given spiritual gifts that will help us cope, the gift of charity, the gift of compassion, the gifts of optimism and resilience. Those are spiritual gifts that come along with having faith in Jesus Christ.

And as the body of Christ we have been given the gift of one another. Nobody is left alone feeling these things. We are in this recovery together and we are sensitive to the needs of one another in ways we never have been before.

I was in a long line at Trader Joe's last Friday. The waiting and waiting caused us in line to take care of each other. One lady couldn't find an insulated bag and another lady found it for her.

The woman in front of me shared that she had somehow lost a lot of her bags in the evacuations and she was still feeling off balance from all the chaos around the fires. So we talked about what she had experienced. She said her priorities are very different this year for Christmas. She is planning to be much simpler and just thankful to be alive. She is prioritizing people over things this Christmas. The lady in line at Trader Joe's was describing the kind of power and wonder in each other that God wants us to embrace and share.

Reverend Dr. Bob Baggott describes this power when he says, "Behind the universe is a power that steadily guides and heals and leads us toward God's goals that will be reached inevitably, despite the set-backs and hardships that dot history. Jesus advises that we stay awake, watching and waiting for these things. Watching and waiting for how God is working, and how God will next come to us."

THE CASE FOR GOD

This month I've been reading Karen Armstrong's book, *The Case for God*. She is

a historical writer who starts with the beginning of human evolution and describes how religion was a part of life even with our most ancient ancestors up to the scientifically influenced religion of today.

She writes: "From almost the very beginning, men and women have repeatedly engaged in strenuous and committed religious activity. They evolved mythologies, rituals, and ethical disciplines that brought them intimations of holiness that seemed in some indescribable way to enhance and fulfill their humanity. They were not religious simply because their doctrines were scientifically or historically sound, or just because they sought information about the origins of the cosmos or wanted a better life in the hereafter.... The point of religion was to live intensely and richly here and now."

She goes on to say her research showed that...

"Truly religious people are ambitious. They want lives overflowing with significance." Instead of being crushed or embittered by the sorrows of life, they retain their peace and serenity in the midst of their pain. They often have the courage to overcome and aspire to live generously and large heartedly.

Dr. Armstrong also describes those who are religious as people who desire to integrate their daily lives with moments of rapture and insight from their dreams or in their interactions with nature and with one another.

ASTRONAUTS' EXPERIENCES

Some examples of this type of insight and moments of rapture can be found in experiences from outer space. Astronauts

returning from space describe how they often experience a whole new perspective of the earth and its people. Many have described it as a spiritual experience that occurs to them while orbiting our planet.

The late Edgar Mitchell said, “What a powerful experience, to see Earth rise over the surface [of the Moon]! And I suddenly realized that the molecules in my body and the molecules in the spacecraft and my partners had been prototyped, maybe even manufactured, in some ancient generation of stars. But instead of being an intellectual experience, it was a personal feeling... And that was accompanied by a sense of joy and ecstasy, which caused me to say ‘What is this?’ It was only after I came back that I did the research and found that the term in ancient Sanskrit was Samadhi.”

A TIME OF WONDER

Advent is a time of wonder, a time of Samadhi, a time to stop our wandering and appreciate the wonder of God who is not distant but right here and now present with us, always nudging us to be more aware of Samadhi (wonder) and to be Christ-like to each other.

Take time to embrace the wonder of this Advent season and think of ways to outdo one another in love. I have a great example from this past week of how a resilient person in our congregation reached out in Christ-like love to others instead of focusing on her own losses.

Karen Bowles brought in Christmas decorations that her daughter did not need anymore to share them with others this year. Even though Karen lost her own home, she isn't dwelling on her losses. Instead she is focusing on the things she still has, such as her daughter, Katie, and ways she can share Christmas joy with others. That is an example of Jesus Christ being revealed to us.

Another example was when the Presbyterian Church in San Bruno called me

last week to announce that their Deacons are not only going to make a one time gift to our Disaster Relief fund but they are going to make it an ongoing donation because they know this recovery period is going to take a long time. That is Jesus Christ revealed to us!

People in our town have said to me a number of times that the firestorm seems to have bonded us together in ways never felt before. The shared disaster experience reoriented many of us and inspired a more compassionate way of being. That is God's light shining in the midst of the darkness.

That is the wonder and awe that God reveals to us when we are patient and wait with expectant hopeful hearts for God's healing power to permeate the pain. That is Advent; the Advent of Christ's coming into the world promoting peace, healing, hope, joy and love. Amen.

Benediction:

The key to a wonderful life is to never stop wandering into wonder. Embrace God's wonder this week. Geer outside and look up at the stars. Hold a baby, talk to an animal, and love everybody.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**

