

What have you given up waiting for?

Note that I am not asking you what you are waiting for. That is a different question which probably has an easier answer. If you are like a lot of people after Thanksgiving, you are waiting for Christmas. If you have children, maybe you are waiting for school to end. Maybe you are waiting for the one you love to come home. Maybe you are waiting for the job to get easier, or better. Maybe you are waiting for it to be better next time, whatever *it* is.

The much more loaded question is what you have given up waiting for. Where in your life have you stopped keeping vigil? What did you once look for but expect no longer? What is the phone call you don't wait for any more, the headline you don't look for any longer, the report you have stopped hoping you will hear?

I want us to think about these things this morning because I think Luke's gospel is thinking about these things. Luke's Jesus here is talking about waiting—and more to the point, Luke makes sure that he is talking *to* people who are waiting, complicated people who are at the same time also the people who have given up waiting, or who are on the verge of giving up.

This is a gospel written for people who were struggling with the in between—and they were struggling because they felt so very stuck there. Luke is the latest of the synoptic gospels, and it was written to people a little way out from the live action Jesus experience, people who knew that the claims of a second coming were less urgent than they had once seemed. Luke's Christians were settling in for the long haul, and I get the sense that maybe they weren't too enamored of the experience. When they hear Jesus talking about the second coming, earlier in this same chapter, and they ask, "when will this be?" they sound a little like kids wondering how much longer the car trip is going to last.

Their question resonates with me because is the experience that I have, and I think the experience that so many of us have. We, too are removed from the live action Jesus. We, too, have been promised the second coming—remember, Advent is really about waiting for Jesus to return, not for Jesus to be born—and it the promise has gotten faded and tattered into abstraction. It is like so many of the deferred dreams in our lives. When will this be? To our question, there is only the cosmic sigh: we'll get there when we get there.

If you look in this gospel for a direct answer, you won't get one. Jesus, being his usual semi-cryptic self, doesn't give any specifics. But he gives that exhortation we know so well in this Advent season: Keep awake. Keep watch. The kingdom of God is near. Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

What's so important to me about these exhortations is that they contain a promise of theological anthropology in them, which is another way of saying that they make a claim about who we as humans are. Jesus's assumption here is not only that we are encouraged to wait. It is also that our waiting—how we wait, with what quality we wait—that those things make a difference.

All of that language about our response to the kingdom is surprisingly active. We don't just sit in the back seat of life staring out the window. There's all sorts of stuff we are supposed to *do*. Look out. Find a way to be ready. We are told that the second coming might surprise us—and yet that surprise is not what Jesus wants for us. Not necessarily because something bad is going to happen. But something so much better might happen if we are prepared to cooperate with it. Change is coming, to be sure—and our availability to change is exactly what invites it in and catalyzes it. We lend change its power by our assent.

I, who so often believe that I am powerless—I, who so often am lulled by time into passivity—I am told that I have a part to play in whatever is going to happen. We all do, if we are willing to stand up.

I may not have control over the second coming, and I may not have control over all that goes down between now and then. But Jesus reminds me that I have control over my preparation—indeed, not just control over, but responsibility for. I have the ability to cooperate with the powers of the world, with the distress among nations, and I have the power to resist it, too. I have the ability to cooperate with the powers of heaven, also. And, sadly, I have the ability to resist them, too.

The in between time—all those miles in our life that seem so pointless—is not a waste but a part of the effort. I read a story once of an eskimo fishing at the ice, looking all day long at a hole at her feet, waiting for some life to appear. At the end of the day, the fish finally flashed to the surface, and she caught it. In one view, her day was a waste of time; it was only the moment when she caught the fish that mattered. But she understood her story differently: the watching was part of the catching.

We are invited to this quality of waiting. It is a waiting that is not short-sighted and so discouraged, but awaiting that accomplishes something in itself, simply by its dedication. We are invited to stand at the end of the ice, looking at that one spot that is not frozen over. We are invited to make ourselves ready for whatever flashes to the surface, whenever it flashes.

Jesus has put our time in our hands. I can choose how to spend my days. So can you. In this time when boredom or discouragement might entice us to surrender our own agency, this is good news. We have the task of waiting for the kingdom. And we have the task of welcoming it.