

Feeling and Waiting and Longing: Advent

Advent 2 Year A

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

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Holy Cross Novi

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Good Morning!

I've been resisting feeling lately, mostly because there's a lot to do, really so much to get done. I know if I acknowledge all I am feeling, these emotions may then consume me and prevent me from getting anything at all done. Instead, I'll find myself backed into a metaphorical and literal corner awash with sadness, anger, loneliness, and a sense of impotence. I so hate, not being able immediately to change the course of events. There are so many personal and communal happenings I'd like to alter. Dear friends I adore died this year. Others are struggling with serious life challenges. My dad's memory is a thing of the past, and on a less personal front, from my limited perspective it seems as if the moral soul of our country is dripping away.

From my conversations with colleagues and friends, it's clear that I'm not alone in having a morass of feelings nipping at our collective toes.

So. To stop and wrestle with where these events and emotions fall in the midst of this season of Advent seems disconnected at best and futile in reality.

But as one of my colleagues keeps saying, "If we can't get out of something, if we can't get past something, well then we may as well get into it."

So where then does Advent fit with our world? Where does it connect to our feelings and fears? How might this time between times, this liminal liturgical space between Christ the King and the birth of Jesus Christ, fit in my life? How might it matter in yours?

The other day, I found a set reflections I wrote after the death of a parishioner. Terry McHugh: Terrance Patrick McHugh. He was the first person I'd ever been with as they died. He was the last person I knew who succumbed to AIDS. He was mid-40s, I was 32.

He was in Hospice. That morning, I'd baptized his Goddaughter at his bedside, made the sign of the cross with chrism on her forehead and anointed Terry with what was left on my hand. We all prayed and cried. I said my good-byes. But parishioners who were spending the afternoon with him called me a couple of hours later and asked me to come back, they needed to leave. So, I returned.

I settled in, sitting on a chair next to his bed. The Television was on, "Mad about You" with Helen Hunt and Paul Reiser was playing in the background. (It was the 90s.) Terry loved his TV, so it seemed wrong to turn it off.

I watched him breathe, listened to the TV, and periodically held his hand.

It was the hardest thing I've ever done. And one of the holiest times I've ever endured—for in those hours I was completely, utterly open and vulnerable to the presence of God. God was acting and I was waiting. Watching. Not doing, but being in the fullest sense of the word. Only on one or two other occasions have I ever been so full of emotion, aware of the world and so fully alive. That day is stitched in my mind as the time when I had enough grace to just wait for God. I felt like I walked out of the room—not the same person I was when I walked in.

Advent.

Advent is that waiting time. It is the time when we wait for something new. The time when we are called to be fully aware of what is dying around us and in us. The waiting, sitting, crying and being may scare the hell out of us—at least it does out of me, but it is the bridge over the ravine, the tunnel through the impasse to all that is new—all that God is calling us to give birth to in our world.

Advent is waiting for the next breath—the next new moment—the next new beginning—the holy time after we end and before we begin again.

I had an incarnated experience of Advent that afternoon, as I sat next to Terry.

Each year in this time as it gets darker and darker, earlier each day, may we too have an incarnated Advent. May we have the courage and the will to sit and wait and watch and if we dare, may we learn that there is always something more.

As I was waiting that day, things inside were shifting, changing, some coalescing and others unravelling.

Frequently we don't want to wait, I don't want to wait because we're afraid, that we're going to be overwhelmed by what we feel, the pain, the sadness and fears. But the call is to wait. To be.

Advent takes its own time,
its own meaning, its own pace.

Advent has an end and a beginning, mostly though it's about the middle. Something has to die for something new to come to be. The waiting in the middle is what ties the two together.

Advent is feeling, breathing, waiting, longing and looking for God being born in our world. Again. May we have the courage, the grace, the tenacity to watch, wait, feel, breathe and see.

Amen.