

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It was December nineteen years ago , but I remember it well. Mom and dad had driven to Bemidji to see my dad's mom, my grandma, who wasn't expected to live. They got there, saw grandma, and shortly after that dad was admitted to the same hospital. Grandma died on Monday and Tuesday mom called me and told me that dad was in surgery, it looked bad. I was on vacation that week and I remember walking to our church, going into the sanctuary and praying. I was president of our congregation at the time and I was in a council meeting that night when Cynthia came to the door, she simply looked at me, I knew what had happened. I asked our vice-president to take over as I excused myself from the meeting. Pastor Mike realized what had happened and he walked out with me.

Cynthia had gotten me a ticket back to Minnesota earlier that day as I was planning to be with my dad after his mother's death. Instead I was going to be with my mom and siblings because of dad's death. I flew into Mpls./St Paul, got a rental and began to drive south on I-35, planning on catching I-90 into Austin. It was dark, roads were okay for the most part, and I was alone with my thoughts in the quiet of the night, driving by myself.

I didn't have to worry about feeling drowsy as I drove, my mind was too active. I remember thinking about all the people I had encountered during the day, all of the full of Christmas cheer, and I remember wondering how they could be so happy, but of course I knew they didn't know about what had just happened in my family in the last couple of days.

My biggest problem driving was focusing on the road, blinking tears out of my eyes, trying not to sob. In my meandering thoughts, I remember thinking about the dream I had had the night before, seeing both dad and grandpa, dad's dad, who had died on Christmas Eve back in 1987. I wondered if my dream was a sign, and if so, what did it mean. And of course I thought about my own life, my wife, our son, our new house, my job and career, all the things my wife and I were involved in at our church. I thought of the long hours I put in at my office, often working 60 or more hours a week, with another 10 or 15 at church. I wondered about my priorities, wondered if there was more to life, if perhaps I should be open to something better, something different. I remember feeling like I was waiting. I just didn't know what it was I was waiting for.

Waiting. It seems I've done a lot of that in my life. Maybe many of us have. But when it comes to waiting, I wonder if the disciples didn't have it even worse than us. They had been with Jesus for three years, day and night, they had seen miracle after miracle, been taught by the Lord, they had heard Jesus' words as recorded in our gospel, they saw Jesus crucified, buried, and then risen again. I wonder if they had a hard time waiting, expecting Jesus to come back soon, in their time.

Whatever they expected, they remembered and recorded Jesus' words, I wonder if his words were as confusing to them as they have been to wondering disciples down through the generations. The signs Jesus mentioned, stars falling, darkened sun, no light from the moon, all these things would not be overlooked, everyone will know when they happen. I wonder what they thought when some in their group began to die before the words Jesus spoke would be fulfilled.

And two thousand years later we still wait. Sometimes we are spiritually challenged because the waiting tempts us to lose our focus, our attention is caught by things that distract us from our calling as the body of Christ, the church, in this world. These distractions often become our focus, even to the point of replacing God in our lives. Material wealth, smug self-satisfaction. The seductive lures of the world. Kind of reminds me of the way the Israelites were lured during the Exodus, the way they were lured all the way up to the destruction of Israel and the diaspora, the exile to Babylon.

Personally I don't like to wait, it's hard for me, I'm not a particularly patient man. But the season of Advent invites me into a time of waiting, a time when my focus is sharpened, renewed, a time to ponder the mysteries of God, to reflect upon God's activity in my life, in the life of the world. A time to think about confession and forgiveness, the sacraments of Communion and Baptism, a renewal and a reminder that I am given new life every day, and I see every day with fresh eyes, and as I look around I see signs of God's activity all around me. I find that some times I look in the wrong places, I look for signs and wonders, and forget that we make a difference in the world one person at a time. I look at the snow covering the ground and realize that all life waits for renewal, it will come but it seems so far away.

It's in the everyday nuances of life that God's promises are seen, God present here and whenever his people gather in his name. God present in our bread and wine, in the Word of life you hear every Sunday, God present in the here and now, under the snow and above it. God is coming in God's own good time, perhaps soon, perhaps not in our lifetimes. And this is why we wait, why we "keep awake" for God's love comes to us every day in small ways rather than in the headlines and one twitter and cable news.

Cynthia and Eric had come from California for dad's funeral, they went back before I did as I stayed with mom a few extra days. Then Cynthia met me at the airport and we went home. Seeking distraction, I went shopping with her later that day or perhaps the next and found myself in the middle of a grocery store with tears flowing. But it was okay because I was looking with fresh eyes at the world around me, God's creation, and I knew I would see dad and my grandparents again, and I would see Jesus coming in glory. I can hardly wait! AMEN