



Sacred Waiting

BY SHELLEY PAGE, MINISTER,
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I can remember being so excited about Christmas morning. The days seemed to crawl by as I happily anticipated the surprises from Santa. And as much as I enjoyed school, I couldn't wait until summer vacation and all the fun I'd be having going to camp, traveling, swimming and spending extended time with my Grandma. I remember what it was like waiting until I was fourteen and could get a license to drive a motor boat in New York State. I couldn't wait to tear around the lake in my family's Boston Whaler. Thirteen seemed like forever for a lot of reasons.

I imagine you can recall that time of childhood, waiting for good things to happen. But it often seems that waiting starts to get a bad rap when we grow up.

Our adult waiting takes on varied forms. There's the everyday waiting in the grocery check-out line or waiting for the waiter (don't you love the English language?!) to bring our check. Then there's what I call the serious waiting: waiting for medical test results, or for a new job after months of unemployment; waiting for a new love, for a precious child to be born or adopted, or to become pregnant with a much desired child; waiting to see if we're accepted for college or a training program or promotion; waiting for a child to grow out of *this* phase, for health to return after illness or injury; waiting for the adult child to *finally* move out and move on, or for grief to subside to gentleness; waiting, waiting, waiting. We actually do quite a bit of waiting over the course of our lives.

These times of waiting can be rich times of anticipation or tense times of apprehension. I ask you to consider the possibility that waiting itself is a spiritual practice, a pregnant moment or series of moments in your life full of potential for growth and insight. Yes, we sometimes rail against the interminable wait, filled with anxiety, tension and impatience. Understandably so. Waiting can feel stressful or even painful as we hope for the best but anticipate the worst.

But this is a season of sacred waiting. The Christian story of the birth of Jesus features lots of waiting: Mary waits while mysteriously pregnant, and her kinswoman Elizabeth waits as well—also pregnant; the shepherds wait in their fields; the three kings wait for the culmination of their journey at Bethlehem; and Joseph and Mary wait in Egypt until it is safe to return home after the slaughter of the innocents by King Herod. Lots of waiting. And so the Advent season is all about waiting—not frustrating, upsetting waiting, but rather sacred waiting. Waiting with sacred intent.

Christians set aside the entire month before Christmas to practice—with intention—sacred waiting. It is meant to be a time of deep reflection in the midst of the busiest, most frenetic time of year. The paradox is marvelous: to seek spiritual quiet by practicing sacred waiting, even as the world around us calls out for an uber-burst of activity.

But really, December is just an intense microcosm of our contemporary lives, filled with more activities than anyone can reasonably handle while we also seek out that contemplative stillness, that sense of sacred waiting deep within us. This paradox is our constant companion.

What would it be like to really practice sacred waiting—or perhaps we could call it holy anticipation? December and January are great months to try it out. Perhaps our ancestors from millennia past had it right. Winter darkness was a natural time to turn inward during the cold, gaze into the hearth fire, scan the stars shining through crystalline night air, slow down to the pace of the earth in its deep winter rest. Imagine yourself truly slowing to the pace of dark winter nights, giving yourself the

Quest

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Patience is not simply
the ability to wait—
it's how we behave
while we're waiting.

—Joyce Meyer

A monthly for religious liberals

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spaciousness to contemplate the mysteries of life, the mysteries of your own life. Sounds just lovely to me...

The progressive Christian theologian Matthew Fox says the Western world is long overdue to come to grips with the blessings of “endarkenment” rather than always focusing on the philosophy of “enlightenment.” He challenges us to befriend darkness and let our inmost selves learn from it. For the darkness has many gifts to bestow.

In our privileged lives, in this place, in this century, we have all but forgotten the gifts of the dark as we over-light our lives 24/7. And yet, the natural rhythm of the earth is the daily pattern of light and dark, over and over, without fail—a holy balance that includes its measure of both endarkenment and enlightenment. A balance that is tipped in favor of the dark at this time of year.

And so I wonder—can you wait quietly in the dark, in the space of not knowing, in the place of mystery?

German writer Rainer Maria Rilke expresses the notion of sacred waiting in another way when he writes: “Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.” Rilke sensed the deep truth that quite often in life we are living in the darkness of mystery, impatiently anticipating our future and wanting answers right here, right now. And he offers the wisdom that waiting is the answer: live the questions now, and eventually, down the road, you will live into the answers.

I remember the first time I heard this Rilke quote. I was a newly divorced mother of two young daughters who knew that marketing fruit juice was not my true calling, but could not yet imagine my way into a satisfying future of meaningful work. A wise older friend gave me this quote and it sat on my dresser mirror for years as, indeed, I waited to live into the answers.

And I did. I raised my daughters and, as circumstances unfolded, I made

different choices about my livelihood, moving from a business career to a non-profit management career and then ultimately to ministry. All the while living the questions, spending time in that space of not knowing, dreaming in the place of mystery, exploring the fertile dark humus where the seeds of my future would take root.

I am still living the questions, which ever evolve in new and intriguing ways, asking me about what I most deeply value and what is most important for me to be doing in this latest unfolding chapter of my life.

Can you wait quietly in the dark, in the space of not knowing, in the place of mystery?

And so I ask again, can you wait quietly in the dark, in the space of not knowing, in the place of mystery? Can you give yourself the gift of pregnant stillness where possibilities are conceived? Will you make space in your life to breathe, relax and let the darkness befriend you?

For the truth is that we are forever waiting for something. Our life journeys will always have us anticipating, waiting—the trick is to make this waiting into a precious time of growth and insight instead of a time of angst and dread.

I like some suggestions that UU minister and theologian Tom Owen-Towle offers for waiting, three words that I think can help our sacred waiting become more intentional and focused.

First, be **perceptive**—really look at your life and see what *can* be, not simply what has been. Look beneath the surface, beyond the literal and behind the ruts you may find yourself in.

Second, be **conceptive**—create something entirely new in that darkness of unknowing. Dream out of the box in collaborative exciting ways that bring

beauty and amazingness to your life.

Third, be **receptive**—open your spirit to gifts that just might emerge from your newfound patience with yourself and the world in this time of waiting.

Perceptive. Conceptive. Receptive.

And, in this unsettling time, let us be perceptive, conceptive and receptive as we imagine a different future where we boldly and bravely address the very real suffering of people of color living under systems of oppression that do not serve human need or dignity. Let us be perceptive to look beneath the surface of manifestations of oppression so that we can begin to truly understand what has been going on for a long, long time. Let us be conceptive to add our energy and good will toward creating the new world we dream about where institutional racism no longer holds sway. Let us be receptive to learning the truth of lives of people of color, and to rolling up our sleeves to work alongside these communities with humility and grace as we all seek to create the peace and justice that is our inherent birthright as children of a loving God. Friends, this is holy work that *is* our work to do.

My wish for you in the holy season of waiting is that you will befriend darkness in your spiritual life and see what treasures await you there. You may want to imagine yourself as a seed, a tiny bundle of potential, safely enveloped in rich dark humus, awaiting the warmth and water of spring.

Dream as a seed dreams of what it might be like, knowing that you can't possibly know yet whether you are a green bean or giant sequoia. You just know you have the potential to become, to grow, and to fully, robustly and joyfully live in the mystery. Lie there patiently in the ground and ask yourself seed questions. Then, live into the answers as your life unfolds.

May your seed time, your endarkenment, your sacred waiting, germinate into beauty and fresh new life beyond your wildest imagination. ■

Sweet Anticipation

BY PETER FRIEDRICH,
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I had the exquisite experience recently of being in the midst of a community of hope. People there were chatting excitedly about the future. They talked about possibility and potential. They weren't burdened by whatever ills befell them in the present. There was lightness and laughter all around me, and I couldn't help but feel buoyed by their shared sense of excitement and anticipation. It was truly infectious, and I couldn't resist joining them.

I'd like to say that where I was at the time was coffee hour after our service. Or during a meeting of our Board or of our lay leadership. Or that it was in the monthly meeting of my minister's support group. But it wasn't any of those. I was waiting in line to buy a Powerball ticket.

There is not, I'm afraid to say, a more hopeful, happy place in America today than that. People were sharing their hopes and dreams with each other. "What would you do if you won?" I heard a range of responses from "buy a boat" to "see the world" to "set up educational trusts for my kids and grandkids." I will admit that my wife and I have played this "what if we won" game for years as we dabbled in the lottery when we deemed the jackpot worthy of our small contribution.

I'm not going to stand here and advocate that you buy lottery tickets as a spiritual practice. I know that the lottery is a form of regressive tax, one that hits the hardest those who can least afford it. But I do think playing the lottery from time to time can help lift us out of our doldrums. The gift of the lottery, for all of us except the winners, is the gift of hope, anticipation and excitement. Fleeting though it may be, a lottery ticket reminds us what it's like

to dream, to dream without restraint. As long as the lottery isn't the primary component of your retirement plan, and you "play responsibly," as they say, perhaps buying a quick-pick now and then isn't such a bad idea.

It is a strange coincidence that here in Pennsylvania one of the largest lottery jackpots in history arrived close to the start of the Christian season of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation and waiting. A time of anxious anticipation. A time of dreaming of what is to come. At its most literal, it's the time before the birth of the Christ child when we are called to, as the carol goes, "prepare Him room."

**Advent is a time of
preparation and waiting.
A time of
anxious anticipation.
A time of dreaming
of what is to come.**

As one author put it, Advent is "a time of waiting for a hoped-for future, waiting for the time of bleakness to pass and the new joy to arrive." I guess when you put it that way, Advent and the lottery (or at least the time between buying a ticket and the drawing of numbers) can be seen as parallel practices.

Advent, of course, isn't about waiting for wealth to descend upon us from the heavens. Nor, for many of us, is this a time when we prepare for the arrival of the Christ child. Yes, we anticipate the arrival of Christmas, that sacred and secular holiday celebrated by many of us. We string up lights, put up a tree and shop for gifts for our loved ones. For most of us, though, it's not a season of patient waiting. Far from it. It can be downright frenetic for too many of us, I'm afraid. But for the moment, I invite you to breathe. To relax. To call to mind the sweetness of anticipation and to remember what it's like to wait patiently for your future to arrive.

Anticipation and expectation are beautiful, pure emotions. Think back to when you were a child, and those days leading up to your birthday. How you looked forward to a day that was made just for you, when you were the center of attention. A day when you would be given gifts from your parents and friends. When a cake with blazing candles was to be set before you, with everyone singing just for you, wishing you nothing but happiness.

Those days leading up to your birthday might have been even better than the actual birthday itself. Maybe you didn't get the gift you really wanted. Or perhaps your mom didn't have time to bake your favorite cake and brought one home from the supermarket. Reality rarely lives up to our fantasies, and that can be a bitter pill to swallow.

That's what makes anticipation so sweet. In our dreams we can create a hoped-for reality that may or may not materialize. I remember several years ago when I began to dream of owning a motorcycle. Of the rides I'd take through the winding country roads of New England on crisp fall days. Of the feelings of freedom I'd have. In my mind's eye, I saw myself as a modern-day vagabond with a tent and sleeping bag slung on the back of the bike, riding the roads without a map or destination. I spent hours and hours anticipating what it would be like. And it felt so good.

So, one day I spotted a used bike sitting on someone's front lawn with a "for sale" sign on it and, after some negotiations both with my wife and with the seller, I bought it. And I rode it, a little. Back and forth to work a few times. An occasional Saturday sojourn. But mostly the bike sat in the garage, gathering dust. I came to realize that such solitary pursuits like long rides in the country didn't fit well with my role as the parent of young children.

I held onto that bike—and the dreams that came with it—for nearly ten years before finally letting it go. The antici-

pation of owning a motorcycle was so much sweeter than the reality.

Anyone might reasonably wonder: What will it be like when I leave home for the first time? What will my wedding day be like? What will it be like in my new job? Will my child grow up to be a great doctor, or writer, or peace-maker? What does the future hold? These questions, and all the others that we face in our lives, call on us to anticipate, to expect, to dream. Our ability to consider the question *What will my life be like if...?* is one of the defining characteristics of our consciousness, our humanity.

Many of us are good at dreaming, at hoping, at planning, even executing plans to make our dreams become a reality. But what we're not so good at is the waiting part, the patience part. "Come, Savior, quickly come," we sing. We don't want to have to wait for

This time of year...we are invited to wait.

our dreams to come true. How many of us, I wonder, would buy a lottery ticket for a drawing that is weeks, months, even years in the future?

This time of year, with the days at their shortest and the nights at their longest, we are invited to wait. To sit in the darkness—of the world, of our spirits—waiting for the light to return, for the light of the world to be reborn.

Perhaps we might learn to wait less like parents anticipating the imminent birth of a child, and more like a tree in winter. If we waited like a tree we might give ourselves over to our dreams and not force their arrival too soon. The first thing a tree does is to let go and to stand silent. Shedding its leaves, the tree lays itself bare and opens itself to possibility. Paul Tillich, the Christian theologian, tells us that there are two kinds of waiting: "the passive waiting in laziness and the receiving waiting in openness." He says

that "waiting in openness...demands patience, and patience demands stillness within oneself." And so, in this season of Advent, amidst all the hustle and bustle, we are called to be still inside ourselves.

Waiting, though, is not a solitary pursuit. We need partners, collaborators in our waiting, to remind us of who we are and who we can yet become, to walk with us in our waiting, coaxing forth our emptiness, our vulnerability, our readiness and willingness to accept what the future holds. In the Bible story of Mary's pregnancy, she is not alone. Elizabeth, her friend and companion, walks this path with her, helping her to keep hope alive. Together they celebrate the sacrament of waiting. Waiting is something to be celebrated, to be cherished.

There is, I think, a tension between the sweetness of anticipation and the sacrament of waiting. When we hope and dream, our focus is on the future. We are living for the "not-yet." At the same time, waiting calls for us to be present to and to face the uncertainty of now. The late UU minister Roy Phillips used to tell of a cartoon showing two men wearing sandwich-boards, parading along the downtown sidewalk. One of them wears the sign: "Jesus is coming." The other shows the words: "Buddha here now."

That about sums up the tension I'm talking about. Our faith calls us to live fully in the present, in all its beauty and all its tragedy. And at the same time, we're called to be ever hopeful of a better future. As mundane as this sounds, the essence of this dual reality is captured beautifully in that old Heinz ketchup commercial, where the child tilts the bottle up and waits and waits for the sauce to slowly ooze out, while Carly Simon sings about "Anticipation" in the background. We know how good that ketchup is going to taste once it finally dresses the hamburger, and yet we must be patient and wait for its excruciatingly slow arrival.

Its very gooey goodness is what makes it so slow in coming.

The active waiting that Paul Tillich describes—"the receiving waiting in openness," to use his words—asks us to be both intimately connected to the here and now, appreciating fully what we have in our current state, and at the same time to be fully expectant of what is to come. Hope-filled and hopeful. It's a tricky balancing act, like having one foot on the dock and the other in the canoe.

Our task, during this time of year and all year long, is to embrace the "both-and" of our existence. To expectantly anticipate and work to form our futures, that which is to come, while we also live fully and faithfully in the present tense, embracing the darkness with passionate patience.

Our hopes and our dreams are in the process of becoming. Our lives, as they are, are precious and powerful, and we must always be present to them in the here and now. "Jesus is coming." "Buddha here now." Both are true. May it always be so. ■

Because of advances in technology, our world literally moves faster than ever. But we are still the same humans, impatient with waiting, feeling that we don't have time. The CLF continues to try to carve out little spaces and places to invite waiting. Whether we are waiting in grief, in anxiety, in eager anticipation or in boredom, we know as humans there will always be times of waiting. Please help us continue to create ways of finding gifts in the waiting by giving a gift of \$50, or whatever makes sense for you at this time.

You can give by going online at www.clfuu.org/give or by calling 1-800-231-3027 or by returning the enclosed envelope. ■

We Needn't Fear the Darkness



BY KATHY SCHMITZ,
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We rail against the darkness, light our
fires, dance and shout. And yet...

We needn't fear the darkness.

It has its own purpose.

It is the time of rest and renewal,
of nurture and healing,
of new beginnings waiting to emerge.
It brings the opportunity for sleep, for
hibernation, for germination.

It is a time of transition, of processing,
of learning to let go.

Darkness has a beauty all its own.
We needn't fear the darkness

We strike back against the silence, sing
our songs, beat our drums,
shout, and stomp our feet. And yet...

We needn't fear the silence.

It bestows its own unspoken blessings.
It is only in the silences that we are
able to hear once again
that still small voice residing deep
within.

It is only in the profound quiet that the
deepest of yearnings of our heart
and the wisdom of our soul can make
themselves fully known.

Silence speaks a message all its own.
We needn't fear the silence.

The lessons learned in the dusk & the
hush are not meant to remain in
hiding.

We do not stay at rest forever.
From the dark and the shadow, from
the silence and the solitude,
We carry our insight into the light
Nurtured and more fully aware
of the inner most working of our
being

we carry this knowledge with us
back into the growing radiance...
when we are ready...

but until then ... we remain
... waiting to emerge. ■

A Litany of Waiting

BY JUDY WELLES
AND DUANE
FICKEISEN, MINIS-
TERS EMERITI OF
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Waiting for the bus.
Waiting for the next election.
Waiting for Christmas.
Waiting for your teenager to come
home at night.
Waiting for Prince Charming.
Waiting for dinner.
Waiting for the light to change.
Waiting for seeds to sprout.
Waiting for the alarm clock to ring.
Waiting for the grief to stop.
Waiting for Godot.
Waiting for the Novocain to take
effect.
Waiting for payday.
Waiting for the bad haircut to grow
out.
Waiting for paint to dry.
Waiting for the mail.
Waiting for things to get back to
normal.
Waiting for the college
admission letter.
Waiting for the coffee to brew.
Waiting for death.
Waiting for vacation to start.
Waiting for Prince Charming.
Waiting for the test results.
Waiting for the other shoe to drop.
"Wait till your father gets home!"
Waiting to turn sixteen; waiting to
get your driver's license.
Waiting for the thunderclap after
lightning.
Waiting for a baby to be born.
Waiting for your sister to get out of
the bathroom.
Waiting for the Messiah.
Waiting for the car to fall apart.
Waiting for the war to end.
Waiting in the grocery line.
Waiting for a pot to boil.
Just waiting.... ■

What Are You Waiting For?

BY MARK V., CLF PRISONER MEMBER

In his well-known poem "If," Rudyard Kipling states: "If you can wait and not be tired by waiting..." I think he had the right of it, but what are we waiting for? It seems to me that as children we learn the word *wait* shortly after we learn the word *no*. We are told to "wait until after dinner," to "wait until you're older," and to "wait until your father gets home."

I don't like waiting. Waiting is a trap, a clear and present danger, when it becomes all that we do. When all we do is wait, we lose our focus on what's important. We miss out on opportunities and there's a chance that we'll lose our friends, loved ones and our freedom. We miss out on life, love and happiness.

I have been incarcerated for 16 years, and have endeavored to live my life according to axioms contained within Kipling's poem "If," including the following: "If you can fill the unfor- giving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run..."

I have filled every minute. I took off running and I haven't looked back. I have earned a college degree, donated my time and talent, created works of art, made friends, and committed ran- dom acts of kindness. I changed and began to develop myself into the man I wish to become.

What are you waiting for? I have de- cided not to wait. I will not wait for the future to saunter up and greet me. I will not wait for my hopes, dreams and prayers to fall into my lap. I will rise up each morning and praise the glory of the day. I shall stride forward with my head held high and with love in my heart. I shall give up my doubts and fears unto the hand of God. And with every breath and step I take I will live and make the world a better place. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

We are so often waiting for something to happen—waiting for appointments, waiting on hold for customer assistance, waiting in line, waiting for approval, waiting for an apology, waiting for a specific date or event! And so we have all done a wild variety of things to keep ourselves occupied while we wait for something more important to happen. Here is just a sampling of the things I've done while waiting, myself. Perhaps it will offer you some helpful ideas of things to do while you'd rather be doing something else. (I'm leaving out any activities that involve my phone or computer, honestly, because since I became addicted to Facebook and online scrabble, I am pretty much happily entertained waiting for almost any amount of time, including the period between January and that late Minnesota spring.)

Here is just a sampling
of the things I've done
while waiting....

Waiting for an appointment: My go to activity, provided there's a trash can, is purse-cleaning. For folks who don't carry purses, I suppose wallets or pockets might substitute. I throw away expired coupons and business cards of people I can't remember meeting, count and arrange my money neatly, try out my pens on old gas station receipts and toss out the broken or out of ink ones. I move things from one pocket to another. This is deeply satisfying and can take anywhere from three minutes to thirty-five. And when the appointment finally comes, I feel so neat and tidy!

Waiting on hold for customer assistance: This one really depends—is there a relentless ad playing over and over? If so, I'll need a more aggressive distraction. A friend recently went to her closet and counted all the pillow cases. Twenty-five, she said. I sometimes like to sweep the floor or sort out and recycle the piles of mail that seem to generate themselves. If there's no loud voice yelling at me, I can do something quieter. In that case, I may get a piece of paper and a pen and write a list of something. To-do lists, of course, are a trusty standby, but a specialty to-do list can be fun. Holiday gifts to buy. Letters to write. Things to throw away. People I want to invite over to dinner.



Waiting in line: What I like to do most is to make up stories about the people around me who are also waiting. Sometimes I actually talk to them and get to know them, but I prefer eavesdropping and deciding who they are and what they care about without actually knowing anything. Depending on what we're lined up for, the stories may vary. I find that this occupation keeps me from getting bitter about the people in front of me or, God help me, the ones who butt in line. In line for a rental car, which can on occasion take hours and not minutes, I sometimes look at people and decide what kind of car they will want. I suppose it's obvious by looking at me that I always get the cheapest one.

Waiting for approval: Now, on a cosmic scale there are people whose approval I will never get, so no amount of amusement will take me there. But there are people, and animals, who simply take some time to warm up and accept that I'm OK—maybe acceptance is a better word than approval here. What I like to do in this situation is to draw back. Rather than push for the approval, I recede. While doing this, I concentrate on any small move-

ment or gesture that is coming towards me, and I receive it as actively as I can. I learned to do this with people from doing it with shy animals. Try it; it does seem to work!

Waiting for an apology: Again, there are some people who are just never going to come through with apologies, and they're often the ones whom I most feel owe me one. What I've tried to do as I've gotten older is to concentrate on the other parts of the relationships, the parts that are OK, and strengthen them, so there's a strong container for the apology if it ever comes. Admittedly, I'm not sure this is a great strategy, because people sometimes appear to think that things are fine and no apology is needed when I do this. But the older I've gotten, the less I have cared about apologies unless they are accompanied by real change of heart or behavior. I don't think any of us apologizes well when we are defensive. So, hope springs eternal. I hope that my generosity when I move on without apologies will eventually bring on a genuine one, and from time to time it really has.

Finally, waiting for a specific date or event: If it's something I'm looking forward to, like someone I love coming to visit or a favorite holiday, I make up little tasks for myself to accomplish before it happens. Small things to do every day, so that I feel some connection between my own behavior and time passing. (I can make great calendar/ lists about these small actions while waiting for an appointment or on hold!) If it's something I'm ambivalent about, or dreading, I think up small rewards for myself on regular intervals while I wait and map those out similarly.



It's fun to think about how we structure waiting as a microcosm of how we live our lives, because truly so much of life is about waiting, one way or another. ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



Waiting: A Story for Chanukah

Rachel went outside and looked up at the sky—again. Had the sun gotten any lower in the trees? It was hard to tell. Why did sunset have to take so long? The neat pile of presents, one for each night of Chanukah, had been stacked in her parents' room for days. Rachel herself had chosen the candles to put in the menorah for this first night of Chanukah—yellow for the *shammas* at the center and one blue for the first night—and the menorah was in the window sill, ready to be lit. The dreidel and a pile of pennies were already on the table, ready to play when the time was right. Which wasn't until after the sun went down. Which it seemed like it was never going to do.

"Rachel!" her dad shouted from the kitchen, "Come here!"

"What?"

"I've peeled the potatoes for the latkes, but they need to be grated. That's your job."

"Dad," Rachel sighed, "wouldn't it be quicker to just use the food processor?"

"Sure, but the blade is too coarse, and they wouldn't be as good. Besides, I remember grating potatoes for Chanukah latkes with my mom. I want you to do it with me. And it will give you something to do while you wait besides wandering outside every five minutes."

"Dad," asked Rachel, picking up a potato, "why do we have to wait for sundown? What's the point? I want to light the candles now."

"Well, for starters," her father replied, "Jewish holidays always start at sundown. You know that. But that's only one piece. For another, do

candles show their beauty the best in the light or in the dark?"

"The dark, I guess."

"And think about the Chanukah story. Isn't

that a story about waiting?"

"No, it isn't!" Rachel was maybe just a little more firm than was strictly necessary, but she went on. "When the Maccabees saw how their people were being treated by the Greeks, they didn't just wait around while everyone's rights got trampled on. They got weapons; they took to the hills to fight. And they won! That is the exact opposite of waiting. They saw a problem and they did what they had to do to fix it."

"I see your point," said her father, "but think about the rest of the story. What happened then?"

"Then they went back to the Temple. And they didn't wait around. They saw that the Greek rulers had made a mess of the place, so everybody pitched in to clean it up and get it ready for worship."

"And then?"

"And then they needed oil for the sacred lamp. And they found some. But just a little. Not enough to last for the eight days it would take to make more. But they didn't wait around. They lit that sucker right up."

Rachel's father raised an eyebrow. "I'm not sure 'sucker' is how we traditionally refer to the Eternal Flame, but OK. And then what?"

"Then.... I guess they waited. To see when the light would go out."

"How long did they wait?"

"Eight days. But the oil just kept burning and burning until they could make more."

"Eight days is a pretty long time to wait without knowing what's going to happen, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess. When I auditioned for *Peter Rabbit* I only had to wait for two days to find out if I got a part, and I just about jumped out of my skin."

Rachel's father laughed. "Jumped. *Peter Rabbit*. That's cute. But you see how sometimes waiting and hoping can be a really important part of the story. The Chanukah story is about people acting to change things that are unjust, and that's really important. But it's also a story about waiting and hoping and trusting that you have enough light to see you through. That's important, too."

"But that's the boring part of the story that you get through in one sentence. They didn't *do* anything. They just waited around to see what was going to happen."

"Oh, I bet they did all kinds of things. They had to rebuild their homes and cook food and sing to the babies and all the things that people do. And I bet they prayed for that light to keep going."

"Dad, do you think that those people waiting and hoping and praying is what kept that light going the whole time?"

"I don't know, but I think that it kept the *people* going that whole time. Which is good enough."

Rachel thought for a moment. "So waiting is something you *do*. It's not just sitting there. It's kind of like moving your heart in the direction of what you hope for."

"That, my dear, is a beautiful way to put it. Also, that is a beautiful pile of grated potato. I think we're ready to mix these latkes and fry them up. Looks to me like the sun is almost down, and latkes don't like to wait to be eaten." ■





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Prepare the way to welcome your inner Christ child—the being of love and light, the spark of holiness that lies deep in us all. Seek the signs of hope and promise in your life and the world around you—the stars that point the way to the Light of God. Make your way to the [stable] of peace and acceptance in the secret depths of your heart.

Prepare a manger in your heart, built from the wood of your life: your body, your home, your physical comforts.

Line it with the straw from your life: your loves and friendships, your memories, your harvest of sweet and bitter remembrances.

Bring your life's gifts to your inner Christ-child: your thankfulness, your contentments, your hopes, your experiences of growth.

Surround your manger with your joys: your loves, the beauties of your life, with those you know and have known, with the Light of Lights.



by **Rev. Simon John Barlow** (1961-2008), British Unitarian minister ■