

Message Manuscript for “While Waiting in Line”  
Delivered to Church for the Highlands  
The First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2010

Well, Black Friday has come and gone. Did you go? Did you participate in saving our economy? If you did participate, what did you get? Whatever it was, one thing I know you got was “in line.” I hear the lines were crazy, as people were not holding much back in their purchases. And the lines grew longer and longer. Next to fighting for spaces in the parking lot, waiting in line has to be the worst part.

We should be used to waiting in lines, though, for that’s where we spend most of our lives. Think about it. We wait in lines of traffic, lines at the grocery store, lines at the bank, lines at our favorite fast food line, lines inside restaurants, lines to vote, lines to use the restroom (ok, sorry, that’s just for women), lines to give more than a few bucks for a cup of coffee, and the lines we know so well at the DMV.

And it’s not just lines we wait in. It seems we wait for everything else as well. We wait for a spouse, for a phone call, for a better job, for test results, for a baby, for a promotion, for retirement, for success, for recognition and for a really long list of other things in life. We just wait.

What do you do while waiting in line? Read what Jessica Simpson is doing these days in the current edition of *People*? Look at which movie star has been impregnated by an alien this week? Do you look like most people in line these days, with heads bowed low as though they were praying for their products but are really busy texting or surfing on your phone? Are you one of those people who sighs real deeply with the hopes that doing so will make the person in line write that check (by the way, who writes checks anymore? (Well, everyone in front of me does!) in line? H.L. Mencken understood this waiting, years ago. He said, *The basic fact about human existence is not that it is a tragedy, but that it is a bore. It is not so much a war as an endless standing in line.* We obviously don’t like standing in lines and we certainly don’t do well with waiting.

And what we have heard from our Scripture Readings on this first Sunday of Advent is that waiting is good; that waiting is something we are called to do. The kind of waiting mentioned here, though, is different than at the grocery store or in a dead-end lane in traffic. What Isaiah and Paul and Jesus call us to do today is to wait, but to wait actively.

We actively wait when we know what’s at the end of the line. It’s a matter of knowing what lies ahead; catching a vision for a preferred future. Isaiah caught God’s vision of a better, just/peaceful world, where weapons were turned into farming tools. He saw all people/nations streaming to God, *In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.* The apostle Paul could see the end as well and he did his best to help other Christians, especially those in Rome, to be ready for it. And, as we just

heard, Jesus could see it and even became it's beginning. They were all working out of a view for what was ahead of them.

One place I hate waiting in lines is at airport. To me, it is worse than the DMV. And , as we have hearse in the news this week, it is even more unpleasant, for what is at the end of the line is a pat down or a picture shoot of you in all your glory. Not much to look forward to there.

And we actively wait for God by understanding what it is that we are waiting for; by knowing what is coming up at the end of the line. I'm the kind of person who can't be still while in line, especially in the car. I keep edging my car over to see what is down the line. I'm sure that you are the same way. This is what the prophets like Isaiah did. And it is what we are invited to do as well. We must know what God's vision is for the future. This is something Jesus kept talking about everywhere he went and it was constantly in his lesson plans with his disciples. It was all about what God had in mind for the world. And what Jesus had to say with his words as well as with his actions painted a beautiful picture of a preferred future.

So, what should the future of the world look like? It looks like one where God is in charge, where people from all nations are streaming to God; ascending the mountain of God together. It looks like people getting freed from the never-ending offerings of modern day Babylons and Caesars, which have held us in bondage and kept us from truly being who God has made us to be. In this preferred future, light punches through the thick veil of darkness and fully illuminates our world. The light shines on the injustices of racism, of bullying, of corporate and individual greed and of our own personal dark corners. The future also looks like one where nations are no longer using bombs to work out their differences, as we have seen happen between North and South Korea this week. No, the world God intends is one as Isaiah saw it, where we are all walking in God's paths and looking to God to arbitrate our differences with peaceful means rather than turning to the lunacy and futility of violence. It is a world where Jesus is Lord and his light is shining.

So, actively waiting is about seeing what is at the end of the line; being aware of what is to come. But, active waiting is also about seeing our role in what lies ahead. It is seeing that the future can be shaped and brought near by our involvement now; that God's vision for the world includes us. It is as Emily Dickenson put it, "*The hope of the future is hidden in the present.*"<sup>i</sup>

This is what Isaiah saw ahead for him and his people. Isaiah saw his nation hard at work working out their problems and working toward peace; beating swords into plows and spears into hooks. He saw people walking in the paths and light of God. He called the house of Jacob to walk in the light of the Lord. Paul saw the role of believers in Rome and elsewhere and called them to wake up and put on the armor of light and to put on Jesus, not wasting their time with drunkenness and jealousy and sleep. Jesus also saw the necessity of an active people as the Son of Man was nearer than they thought. They were to be awake and alert.

One of the popular aspects of video games these days is to allow the player to be involved as an interactive participant in the end of the game. Games like Sim City and the Sims have done this, giving the players a definite role to play in the outcome at the end. And God has done this as well. We don't just see what's going on at the end of the line; we realize that we have been given the tools and resources to determine what happens there.

Our waiting today, then, is not the kind that involves a rocking chair or a soft comfortable pew. No, it is to be an active one, just as it was to be for the people in Isaiah's day. It is characterized by an acute alertness in the way of Paul and per the instructions of Jesus. It is being alert that you and I are the participants with a role to play in the outworking of God's system for the world. Such alertness shakes us out of the stupor of our slumber. It gets us up and out of our warm, comfortable beds and gets our feet on the cold floor of reality we are living in and demands that we do something; that we do something to make a difference in this world we have been placed in. We are to awaken to the idea that we are the ones we have been waiting for; we are to be participants in what God is doing to fully arrive in this world. Are you awake to this idea? It's like the old bugle song, Reveille, puts it, "It's time to get up. Its time to get up. Its time to get up in the morning!" are you hearing it or are you still asleep?

We shape the future and participate in God's plan when we take a meal to a hungry person, when we paint thirsty walls with fresh paint, when we pull up carpet to make fresh walking space for young feet. It happens when we are helping women find budding hope in a dress and heels found on the rack of Dress for Success. Yes, the future is shaped when you sit down with a child and read, work on a math problem or just ask about their day in the Lighthouse program. The future is shaped when veterans who have lost all hope and resources start getting it all back as they transition into civilian life at the VOA Veterans Home. We make the future healthy when we work in the now to make this world a better place.

Being active in our role of active waiting provides hope not only for others God is using us to touch but also to ourselves. There is an immediate payback to our staying awake and active. When you are busy for God and serving Him, you tend to forget about the size of the problems in your life and of the difficulties of the day. This thing of hope gets all over you while you are making it possible for others. That's just the way God designed it. So, if you aren't feeling much hope today, help someone this week and see what happens inside of you.

Isaiah's prophecy here ends with an invitation to the house of Jacob, *Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord*. How fitting for us today, here in our house. House of the Church for the Highlands, come, let us walk in the light of the lord. For it is in such light that we shall find hope.

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<sup>i</sup> Dickenson quote found on Sermon Nuggets

[http://web.me.com/lindyblack/Sermon\\_Fodder/Lectionary/Entries/2010/11/28\\_ADVENT\\_1A.html](http://web.me.com/lindyblack/Sermon_Fodder/Lectionary/Entries/2010/11/28_ADVENT_1A.html)