

Waiting and watching

J Shannon based on a Peter Millar talk

The third week of Advent is about Waiting and watching – we've done a lot of that lately. In fact, we done so much we're over it. Hands up those who have stopped watching the news – or only vaguely listen? Lots of us have turned off from the bad news. Blah, blah, blah – and then something gets our attention... but it's never good. Now I'm asking you to stop and listen. To watch and wait because this is the time of year miracles happen. This is the time of year your grumpy neighbour invites you over for drinks. This is the time when you receive an unexpected thank you.

This is the time of year your church asks you to stop!! Stop running around like a mad person and remember why we are here...the reason for the season. I'm blessed! I have to work on Christmas day and so I said to Geoff, I can't cook! How are we going to manage this – and you know what? Champaign and prawns and good friends with a trifle made the best Christmas day ever! We get so Martha'ed up that we can't relax and enjoy. Go sit with Mary & listen.

What would you say to the other Mary (Mother Mary) in her last month? Relax!! Savour it because your life will be different forevermore. So let's take our own advice. Savour it. Savour the season of coming into being. For from now on, your life will be different.

My favourite nightly ritual this time of year is... just before bed, I sit in in silence of the loungeroom lit only by the Christmas tree. I study the ornaments that are the story-telling baubles of our family life. Every year looks different and I try and take a mental snapshot. I sit for a moment and wait. For *this* is another moment. There will be no other moment like this one. It joins the beaded strings that dress my Christmas memory tree.

We can start our vigil with some prophetic words from *A Wee Worship Book*. Let this give us some perspective:

For all that God can do within us,
for all that God can do without us,
thanks be to God.

For all in whom Christ lives before us,
for all in whom Christ lives beside us,
thanks be to God.

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,
for where the Spirit wants to send us,

thanks be to God.

These comforting words invite us to deepest meaning of waiting and of watching and waiting. They throw open the great canvas of our lives, of our world and of God's presence within it all. This is not a description of a small God who is at hand to fulfil our every wish. Quite the opposite., Gregory of Nyssa, in the 14th century said, 'It is the whole of nature, extending from the beginning to the end that constitutes the one image of God who is.' (repeat)

Peter Millar wrote this prayer some years ago when living in Australia:

God of bush and bog-myrtle, of old man banksia and dancing birch,
of sheltering aspen and Huon pine, of heather and eucalypt,
illumine our minds that we may embrace your sacred earth with renewed
tenderness and rejoice in a cosmos
imbued with your wisdom. Amen

It's important that in Advent we are not waiting on a God of our own making: just a larger version of ourselves! We need to expand our universe to God's universe. While are prayers may be focussed on our families and our neighbours; our governments and those nearby, we also have to hold the wider world in which we hear the tears of millions.

We have to offer a prayer that includes help for our wounded earth;
hope to those enslaved to others or even enslaved to power, greed and money. We must care for the generations yet unborn.

This allows us to enter more meaningfully into the mystery of God. Giving us an opportunity to recognise that like it or not – we are brothers and sisters to all of humanity. It allows us to hear again all those who remind us that the weak ones in our society have so much to teach us. If only we can watch and wait.

Sit silently beside your Christmas tree and think of Christmases around the world. They too have turned off the news.

Prayer:

Lord of Advent,
come to our world of military might, political blindness and fake news,
and overturn our tired ideas of power and glory
until your wisdom invades our understanding.