Advent
waiting

AIMS

To provide some thoughts about waiting during advent including stories, prayers and activities that fit with this theme

INTRODUCTION: Waiting in Advent

Our word Advent comes from the Latin adventus, which means ‘coming’. In everyday thinking and speaking, it’s come to mean the arrival of an important person or thing. For us it’s the time before Christmas, but it really signifies a future that comes towards us as God’s gracious gift.

Each Advent we need to reflect again on our experience of waiting, of waiting on God and of waiting for the coming of Jesus. Here are some ideas to help you to do that.

Let me tell you (1)

It was the night before Advent Sunday. I remember this because my birthday falls around this time of year. My daughter, then a toddler, had been rushed into hospital because she had developed a difficulty in walking. From being quite happy to toddler about everywhere and anywhere, she seemed to have decided she could no longer walk and was just sitting in her buggy, unwilling to get out.

You might think this unremarkable, but I worked daily with children with developmental difficulties so perhaps I was a bit more tuned into the possibilities this might suggest. At the hospital she was immediately taken to have an MRI scan of her spine. I was told it would take at least one hour. I had to wait.

I sat in a chair by the window. It was dark outside and inside the room seemed very hot. But as I sat and waited I became aware of a cooling and calming feeling coming to me. ‘Be still in the presence of the Lord’ were the words that came into my mind.

I waited and must have fallen asleep. Sometime after midnight the staff bought my daughter back from the scanner and talked to me what they had found. She was treated in hospital for a few weeks and made a full recovery.

Let me tell you (2)

The first time I kept a vigil in prayer for anyone it was the son of our minister. His parents had asked us all to pray with them on the night of his heart transplant. He was a young man with a young family. Without the heart transplant he was likely to die soon. Yet the operation itself was an ordeal requiring the skill and knowledge of a whole team of people as well as the consent of the heart donors that the heart of someone they loved should be used to give new life to someone else. The whole family had been waiting a long time for the operation to take place.

Because I was away from home at the time of the operation I was unable to join physically the vigil they were keeping at their house. But at the time I got the phone call to say the operation was going ahead, I lit a candle in my room and placed it on a small table. I sat down beside this and in my prayer said the names of those I knew who were involved quietly and slowly, leaving space for those who’s names I didn’t know.

Those of us who took part in the vigil found it very moving. The father of the young man who received the transplant said that he had felt physically held by fact that we were all praying at the time.
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Although it took time for him to recover and return to his family the experience of taking part in the prayer vigil never left me. It is one of the things that I remember whenever I’m asked to pray for others, particularly those who have long term health needs. I may be remembering their names in my prayers for many days, weeks or months, but I remember what this young man said about the sense of physical comfort that knowing he was being prayed for had bought to him, and I go on naming others in my prayers and waiting.

About waiting

Think about waiting. Read for yourself or share with others the ‘Let me tell you stories’. What experiences of waiting do you have to reflect on, or listen to others share their stories if you are in a group.

There is something in this time about waiting: about being prepared, for something new, waiting for cards and presents, getting the house ready with decorations, trimming the tree, preparing the food, getting everything ready.

In nature too it’s a season of waiting. We look at creation in the autumn with all the amazing colours in nature’s palette at that time and then see the leaves gradually falling from the trees. But things are not dying but getting ready: waiting, beneath every falling leaf was a bud, ready, waiting, for new birth and new growth in the spring.

Waiting can be exciting, draining, a challenge, a time of anticipation, a joy, a difficult thing to sustain. How would you describe different times of waiting?

Waiting:
waiting for a bus or a train,
waiting for an appointment,
waiting for an operation,
waiting for an interview,
waiting for birth,
waiting for a special event,
waiting for a special person,
waiting for death.

Waiting may feel different at different times in our lives. How has it changed for you in your lifetime?

Waiting in the Bible

Read Psalm 139 carefully (see toolkit item Praying with the Bible for other suggestions about how to read the Bible prayerfully).

The psalm suggests that God has been waiting with us and for us for a long time.

Can you think of some times in your life when you thought God was waiting with or for you?
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God’s desire is to be present to us, to be in relationship with us, constantly creating us and bringing us to birth as we move deeper into that relationship. Prayer can be a way of waiting with God, in which we become more tuned into God and what God hopes for us.

At the end of the psalm the writer seems to get rather carried away, but perhaps because it has been possible to be safe in God’s presence, the writer is able to say what it really on their mind and not hide even these difficult thought from God.

Are there things you find it difficult to include in prayer?

Read Psalm 42 carefully.

Here the psalmist writes about other strong feelings. This time it is being far away from God, even in exile that troubles the writer.

Our birth into the human family means constantly travelling and making choices for ourselves along the journey of life.

We have each received the gift of journey. Sometimes our journeys are easy: we walk with purpose, there is a focus to life, there is a joy and a delight. There is a lightness in our step and the road seems level and easy. It’s often at times like this too that God’s presence is vivid and indisputable. We forge ahead with confidence, certainty and clarity. We walk with boundless energy and enthusiasm and are eager to face the challenges ahead.

But then suddenly the terrain seems to change. Things aren’t so clear and obvious. We seem to be battling through feet of mud that pull us down with every step. Or maybe it’s dry and arid like the desert.

As we come to Advent again, think about this year. Was your journey easy or difficult? What words or pictures would you use to describe it? Read these psalms again slowly and see if the images these writers use help you to put your own thoughts into words or pictures.

You may like to draw a picture of your journey or write a word or two on a small card that captures what for you has been the journey through this year so far.

Put the picture or word cards in a place that you will use for prayer during Advent [see the prayer booklet for ideas about making a prayer space]. This could be a physical place, or it could be a place in your Bible, or it could be a bag that you will take with you during the next few weeks.

End your time of reflection with this prayer.

Prayer

Loving God, teach me to seek you,
and reveal yourself to me as I seek;
for unless you instruct me
I cannot seek you,
And unless you reveal yourself
I cannot find you.
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Let me seek you in desiring you;
Let me desire you in seeking you;
Let me find you in loving you;
Let me love you in finding you.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

You may want to make a prayer space for Advent. There are ideas in the prayer booklet. You may want to try other Advent prayer activities. Please revisit the website. You may have ‘let me tell you’ stories or other suggestions to send in. Please send them to the vision4life co-ordinator, Janet Lees: admin@vision4life.org.uk

Acknowledgements

You may use this material in your church magazine provided you mention that it comes from Vision4life.