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Between Here and There

by M. Jane Hansen

I am waiting
-for what?
To be there, not here,
To be somewhere else;
To have that, not this,
For 'this' to be over;
For then, not now,
To have tomorrow, today.

I am waiting for
The pain to be gone and
My future certain;
A sense of security and
My life to make sense;
My world to be different and
The landscape to change.

I am waiting for God to
See things my way and
Change His mind.

God is waiting for
My 'there' to become His 'here';
My 'that' to become His 'this';
My 'then' to become His 'now'.
God is waiting for
Me to see things His way and
Change my mind.
God is waiting until
I see myself and my world
Through His eyes.

God and me, together, waiting –
Until there is no distance between
'Here' and 'there', 'this' and 'that', 'now' and 'then';
God and me, waiting together and
Both of us longing for
The waiting to be over.

Waiting for? Waiting upon?

By Judith Anne O'Sullivan

As I write, it's Ash Wednesday and I'm in a privileged place companioning people on a silent retreat in Waipiata. Once again I'm in awe as God breaks through into peoples' lives in the silence, as they 'wait upon' their God and eventually allow God to 'wait upon' them. Yes, silence can unmask us to draw us deeper into the Divine mystery, the life of the other, the life of the Trinity. Thus we're enabled to live present to the Presence in the present, to live in the NOW.

As I ponder this theme of 'waiting', I'm aware of being attracted and distracted – attracted because there's something about 'waiting' that allows me to let go and let God: distracted because the idea of 'waiting for' can remove me from being grounded in the NOW, if I allow my thoughts and hopes to carry me into the future.

When I reflect on my life as a spiritual director companioning others on their God quest, I feel like a midwife 'waiting upon' the miracle of new birth. I've been engaged in this ministry since 1980 and during this time most of my strongly-held ideas have undergone radical new birth. Even as I articulate the phrase, 'waiting upon God', I'm aware of its paradox.

It seems to me now the birth awareness is that God is 'waiting upon' me. For me this parallels what's expressed in St John's first letter, 'This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that God first loved us'. Likewise it's not that we wait upon God, but that God first waits upon us.

In my experience 'waiting upon' is very different from 'waiting for'. If I'm 'waiting for' something, I have an expectation, an agenda. I'm letting my mind take me into the future and distract me from attending to what is happening now. On the other hand, 'waiting upon' denotes an attitude of presence, a vulnerability, being in the NOW knowing all is gift. In this space I become aware God is 'waiting upon' me. So as I companion these beautiful people on their retreats, we 'wait upon' the mercy and gift of God together. I stand in awe as I reverence the position of 'midwife'.

Of course our awareness that God is 'waiting upon' us grows as God reveals a little more of the mystery of the Trinity's hidden life within us. As we let go our agenda and surrender to the Gracious One, we come to know God 'waits upon' us.

Pausing, I look out of the window at the spectacular view and see all of creation 'waiting upon' the life-giving elements of sun and rain. The colours and shadows, sounds and silence are all formed by the creative dance of 'waiting upon'. An eagle flies into view, waiting upon the wind to carry it higher on its journey into space. Birds sing, perhaps unknowingly waiting upon the breeze to carry their song to a neighbour in a nearby tree.

Oh, blessed 'waiting upon' all happening in the NOW of this great mystery.

This morning as we chanted Psalm 42 a phrase jumped out at me. 'Wait in hope for God'. This put me more in touch with my distraction about waiting.

I feel 'waiting for' can be like a child – so many sleeps before Christmas waiting for Santa. God is not a Santa giving out things. God is indeed the One we wait upon in hope, knowing and trusting God longs for us and longs to give us the awareness of the Trinity's presence within us.

God IS the One in whom we live and move and have our being. We don't need to 'wait for' God. We are already possessed by God. We are being 'waited upon' by God. Jesus is the 'waiter' at the table feast of our lives. The Holy Spirit waits upon us to be open and willing to be lured into the desert where God speaks to our hearts.

Speaking of desert, how many of us have companioned people only to hear after many and profound life-giving experiences, they now feel they are in the wilderness, the desert. Some will say 'the Holy Spirit has left me.' Like Jesus they feel led into the desert where there are no props, no certainties and no warm, lovely feelings.

The desert is a place of emptiness, dryness, nakedness, vulnerability, darkness and aloneness. This is the place of transformation and if we 'wait for' God to return gifting us with experiences like our past ones, we will indeed be disappointed. Those experiences gave us what was needed at that time. This is a new time. This is the time for 'waiting upon' God. God hasn't left us, rather God longs for us to become mature in our relationships.

It's not in our best interests to 'wait for' the experiences of God. We already have the God of the experience even though we may not feel this truth.

God can't be contained, expected or demanded. God is beyond any word, image or feeling of our past. God IS God. Even though we may not feel any experience of God as present, we are called to live in faith knowing that God is so much 'bigger' than any experience we may have.

All of this is gift and we're completely dependent on God, awaiting God's good pleasure. And in the desert we are transformed. The empty space within us becomes a place where we 'wait upon' God. We no longer need certainties or security. God is our all. We live in Faith trusting like the Mystics that all is well and all manner of things will be well.

It's precisely when we feel we've lost everything in the desert that we come to realize we have everything. The only reality is the NOW when we 'wait upon' God who is present 'waiting upon' us. Only Now can we pray like our ancestors of the Exodus wilderness the prayer of Jesus, 'give us TODAY our daily bread'.

...silence can unmask us
to draw us deeper into the
Divine mystery



God waits too – Words out of Silence

by Bruce Hamill

For two years prior to my first silent retreat (just completed) I was half conscious of my need. That's a polite way of saying I knew something was wrong but spent most of my time in denial. I'd been working hard through a significant process of missional reform in my own church. I was also part of a group of ministers seeking to support each other as missional leaders. I had no lack of theoretical engagement with the issues.

That year I published an academic article in the leading journal of systematic theology (IJST) on a key issue in the contemporary debate on the nature of the church. However, although I was reluctant to admit it, theoretical engagement and spiritual life (not to mention spiritual leadership) can come apart.

This became clear during our process together as leaders. Our task was to discern a 'leadership challenge' we all faced. We forwarded these to an 'expert' in Canada who Skyped us all and spoke individually to each of us. To me he talked of two things but one resonated in a way that surprised me. He said my leadership would require developing 'spiritual authority'.

At that point I knew deep down that he was right and I knew that my spiritual life was empty. My lack of confidence was not merely a personality issue. What surprised me was this guy in Canada was able to see that (and bold enough to say!) after reading just five hundred words from me about my parish challenges.

The Spirit of Jesus – the Jesus who descended into hell and through its closed doors – was moving through some fairly heavy doors of cynicism and despair.

Late in 2012, I read a couple of interview articles by the brilliant theologian Sarah Coakley entitled "Prayer as Divine Propulsion". In these she argues that prayer, according to Jesus and Paul, is more a process of self-displacement (thy will be done, we do not know how to pray) and the reordering of desires (asceticism) than 'punctiliar requests'. These articles made it very clear what I needed to do. So when the opportunity arose to go on a Seven Day Silent Retreat led by John Franklin and Judith Anne O'Sullivan I said 'Yes', in spite of all my fears and my prejudices about the contemplative tradition.

From Feb 9 – 15th at En Hakkore retreat centre in the hills overlooking the Maniototo, I went into silence to 'learn to pray'. By the time I decided to go I was quite looking forward to it. However I'm not sure how ready I really was to trust the process, since I had brought along nine books to read (just in case)! Were they going to be God-stoppers or distractions?

Not all of them were solid theological tomes and trusted friends suggested taking things I could read 'devotionally' rather than analytically. As it turned out, one proved to be a

wonderful guide for the journey. I slowly and reflectively made my way through the 13 short but rich chapters of Ronald Rolheiser's *Forgotten Among the Lilies: Learning to Love Beyond our Fears* (Doubleday: 2005), journaling as I went.

Apart from brief advice about praying in silence we weren't given a lot of instruction. One comment from John Franklin stayed with me for the whole week. 'There's nothing you have to do, but whatever you do, do it in the presence of God.' So I set out learning to quiet my mind with its constant chatter, take in my environment, and live with simple questions. My main question was simply 'Where are you, Jesus, in this situation?'

Previously I always thought of doubt in two ways: doubt which questions the inadequacy of various beliefs (critical thinking) and doubt which is a more pervasive fear of believing (a paralysis of commitment). I prided myself on fostering the former and avoiding the latter. However as retreat time flowed, I became conscious the latter was a part of me – perhaps a part I preferred to dissociate myself from, in order to move in and out of it.

**I was struck by how patient
God had been with me
over seventeen years as a
minister of the gospel.**

Sometimes I found myself feeling sceptical about everything I was doing, and then I'd go for a walk and find myself surprised and overwhelmed by a sense of the presence of God. Such experiences are not easily shared and die as soon as they find words. Like many people I'd written poems of dubious virtue in my youth. On these walks I found myself unable to resist the joys of language again. I rediscovered a poetic voice. More on this in a moment.

En Hakkore is situated in gold mining hills, overlooking the panorama of the Maniototo Valley. Twenty minutes' walk up a gravel road is an abandoned gold town which, at its height in the 1960s, exceeded the population of Dunedin. The graveyard tells some of its stories.

I wore my shoes down walking and running up and down that road. I swam in the dam and watched the sun set. And in all of this, various aspects of my life floated into consciousness, particularly my family life. Pain is probably too dramatic a word to describe the outcome. It felt like the beginning of a process of repentance buoyed up by a powerful sense of the presence of God. The Spirit of Jesus – the Jesus who descended into hell and through its closed doors – was moving through some fairly heavy doors of cynicism and despair.

The process and rhythm of life was powerful. The only speaking we did were half hour conversations with retreat leaders. Our body rhythms seemed to slow down. The cooks told us we looked like zombies, walking around in slow motion. Food tasted exquisite and all our senses were finely tuned. To feel the earth, I went without shoes wherever possible. Encountering others was interesting. Initially I felt adrenalin rise as I was drawn to engage with others.

Once accustomed to the routine, it was deeply relaxing.

The experience of silent prayer and 'practising the presence of God' led to a profound sense of my own failure in prayer. As my own hunger for prayer grew, I became conscious of how little I'd prayed and how I'd failed my family and my congregation in this. Sure, I could say the words, but the heart of prayer had been missing – the listening. I was struck by how patient God had been with me over seventeen years as a minister of the gospel.

Perhaps that hunger will be the main thing I take from this retreat, for that will drive the disciplines I choose to make space for prayer in my life.

Here are some words I experienced as gift and honed into poems from the silence. If you've been to En Hakkore you may recognise the place in them.

Clouds over the Maniototo

There is cloudiness and then
there are clouds
Luminous like everything here
only more so
as if they have God inside.
Dark underbellies
yet screaming with laughter on top
a gaggle of cardinals
mushrooming over the near hills
Apocalypse in slow motion
Absolution to the combed fields

Hamilton Cemetery

The water goes underground here
taking on a deeper resonance,
a lower register,
for the ministry of irrigation.
In the stillness of the evening
still moving,
a gurgling conversation with the ancestors,
watering their graves.
A prayer for the goldfield postie
dead on delivery
A prayer for the parents
killed by the death of their two-year-old
A prayer for all who come rushing still
and find water still
moving

The Little Digger

The little digger lies sleeping
in the paddock
lulled there by the cries of sheep
echoing their way
across the landscape
Apparently it's a 'Cat'
bowed down in the valley
beneath the tall pine sentinels
as if in prayer.
The roar of the wind in the pines
is not the roar of a lion
but then neither is the roar of a lion

Adoramus Te Domine

We adore you slowly
like rocks on whom water drips.
But we do not despair
for we are being re-minded.
Though a million nano-electricians
labouring over a million synapses
for a million years
would die before the promised land,
though we forget to watch and pray,
and the path to the cross winds tortuous
in the falling dark,
we do not despair,
but adore you slowly,
for you re-remind us, and we are re-remembered

Help

I lift my eyes.
The stillness of the hills
is complete.
The city has become a field of grass
A concrete hearth and its companion
a sheet of corrugated iron
remember 4000 people
including 40 storekeepers
and 25 proprietors of liquor outlets
silenced by the canoodling of magpies
drenched in the electric hum of cricket life.
The hills maintain their silence.
The rocks sleep
with the dead in Christ.

Waiting in the rhythm

by Mary Hepburn

'I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky.....'¹

Perhaps it's the timeless rhythm of Silence that attracts and draws us. The ocean and waves have always intrigued and attracted me. There many ways to be part of the gift of creation!

This morning on my retreat there was good surf, made all the more attractive by the welcome sunshine. As I sat on the sand, I was caught up in the rhythm of the waves. Wave, upon wave, upon wave. A wave can't be captured. Each is unique, extraordinary, doing what a wave does. How can it be each wave knows when to peak, when to roll over, when to continue onto the sand and let itself be drawn out again into the ocean? Is it the wave itself, or the rhythm of the wave?

During my daydreaming I noticed a surfer! To my novice eyes, the surfer was a good one. He watched and waited in the waves for the right moment to get on his board and ride. He studied the movement of the waves. At times he'd shift his position up or down the beach. Then it came to me! It's all about waiting!

There has to be suitable surf – and that's out of our control. Experienced surfers know they can surf well, only by being ready to join the rhythm of the waves. It's about waiting attentively for the right conditions – then knowing through practice, how to be carried by the wave.

We too, wait for what we know will come. We wait because we know God is with us now. We live in the 'now-ness' of God as we look forward in hope. As community, we live the gift of daily meditation, Gospel reflection and prayer together. In this rhythm we live and wait and discover more the God who is always waiting lovingly, attentive to all that is, drawing us into God's as yet unrealised dream for all our sisters and brothers and everything that is.

We become part of the rhythm and the rhythm carries us. And in the daily rhythm, in God's time, we discover more than we think we know.

As I write, it's the beautiful season of Lent. We sing '*Come back to me with all your heart*'.² Time to turn again, to watch, to wait – now – in the desert or on the mountain, in the night or day, in ministry and in quiet, alone and in community. Our hearts wait – now. God waits. Fully present – now. God's good at waiting – has lots of practice! Waiting is God's natural rhythm of things.

God

You are
the rhythm of all that is

Your rhythm.
You are in the silence

You wait

while the longing in my heart

You are Silence

becomes part of the rhythm

You are

¹ *Sea Fever*, John Masefield, 1902

² *Hosea*, Gregory Norbert, osb, 1972

Another TYPE of waiting

by Kelvin Wright

In every marriage there's usually one partner who's on time for everything and one who's not. In my marriage 'tis I who's compulsively, obsessively on time, and Clemency who's a fashionable few minutes late for everything, and I mean everything.

Consequently, over the past thirty-six years I've learned well the dynamics of waiting. I well know the frustrating, watch-glancing impetus to get moving and the elasticity of time as it slows to a crawl in those last ten minutes before departure.

My compunction to be on time derives, in part anyway, from a Myers Briggs 'N' personality type, where I am continually orienting myself to the future. If I'm preaching or conducting worship or doing some other important task, there's also an anxious desire to adequately complete all necessary preparation and an excited anticipation of a pleasurable event.

Often waiting is that state when the anticipated future reaches back – the present becomes a holding place defined by what is to come, a preamble to the coming event, whatever it might be. So the *possibility* of what's to come takes on more urgency than the *practicality* of what is.

I tap my fingers impatiently as yet again, I find myself waiting.

Even though I seem to do a lot of it, I've never much liked waiting. But recently two things happened which considerably changed my attitude.

Firstly, my growing practice of daily meditation. I've dabbled with meditation for years – decades actually – experimenting with the Jesus prayer and various forms of awareness and breath meditation. Then over the past six or seven years, influenced by Ian Gawler, Laurence Freeman and finally Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer movement, a time of concentrated silence has become an increasingly necessary part of every day.

Meditation is waiting. On my prayer stool, I give up all attempts to make something happen and sit in outer and inner silence. I do this, not for the immediate rewards, but for the sake of a deeper more profound change which I know may take months or even years. Meditation is a very long wait indeed, though on a daily basis there's a simpler waiting.

My practice doesn't involve me in trying to stop my mind producing its usual random quota of thoughts, but it does encourage me not to follow any particular thought away from my silent place in the present.

For an 'N' personality, the thought that most often needs releasing is 'what's happening next?' My contest with this thought is symbolised in the use of my clock. I set a timer as a hedge against impulsiveness, but for much of the session I must resist the urge to peek to see how much longer there is to go. This small daily exercise has helped me accomplish the bigger wait; to sit comfortably in the present.

Secondly, and more importantly, has been an encounter with my own mortality. We all know we're going to die, but very few of us actually believe this. A few years ago it became impossible for me to maintain that disbelief. I sat with my urologist as, like a travel agent planning for my holiday, he outlined various options for my future and their likely scheduling.

It's quite sobering to have a specialist tell you that you have an X % chance of living for Y number of years. I drove home from his office feeling like a condemned man grasping something quite significant about capital punishment: the punishment isn't actually death – after all everyone dies including judge and executioner. The punishment is knowing when death will occur – time, place and method set. The sheer terror of that future event reaches back and creates its own particularly awe-full kind of waiting; THAT is the punishment.

The shock and fear of that encounter soon dissipated for me in conversation with friends and supported by those who love me most. And I'm glad to say so far, so good. I seem to be observing or even bettering the specialist's most optimistic guesses.

I realise I do believe all those things I've been preaching these many years. And death, rather than a terror, looms before me now as a door to an unimaginably exciting adventure, learning and fulfillment. This insight has had a wonderfully transformative effect on my living. I do believe I'm going to die and all my life is now lived in the shadow of that future certainty.

In other words, all my life has become a sort of waiting, but a waiting in which I'm no longer impatient for the future to arrive. Knowing the end, I want to spend as much time waiting as I can.

So suddenly the now is to be savoured and enjoyed for all it can offer. All life has become a waiting, and all waiting has become living, even when there's only seven minutes left to make a ten minute journey and she still hasn't decided which shoes to wear!

I set a timer as a hedge against impulsiveness, but for much of the session I must resist the urge to peek and see how much longer to go.

Our Father is waiting Music and Lyrics

by Malcolm Gordon

Luke 15:20

It's ages since I've rested
Since I felt love and felt protected
It's a lifetime since I really felt alive

It's forever since I laid down
All this striving all on my own
Seems eternity has come too soon for me

Then I heard a whisper come to me, a sacred rumour
That how life is, is not how it should be

**For our Father is waiting
Face set to the horizon
His eyes ever watching the road home
And though my strength is fading**

**My heart close to failing
Life comes as the Father runs to me**

Now that I am home bound
Every weakness seems to be found
As this journey in the light lays all things bare

Whoever I thought I was
Has to meet its end here because
There is something new that's rising up in me

Then I heard a whisper come to me, a sacred rumour
That how life is, is not how it should be

**For our Father is waiting
Face set to the horizon
His eyes ever watching the road home
And though my strength is fading**

**My heart close to failing
Life comes as the Father runs to me**

If I had the will I'd be at home
If I only knew the way I'd go
But I need someone to come and show me
Yeah I need someone to make a way for me

And miles from home he takes my place
And his welcome I receive by grace
To the Father's open heart and open arms

Long he stays in that dark place
Til every tear is wiped from every face
As eternal love invades this time and space

Cos now I hear a whisper come to me, a sacred rumour
That how life is, is not how it will be
For our Father is waiting

**Face set to the horizon
His eyes ever watching the road home
And though my strength is fading
My heart close to failing
Life comes as the Father runs to me**



Return of the Prodigal Son - Rembrandt

The song is available from www.onevoice.org.nz

Waiting in Jesus

by Mark Chamberlain

*In Jesus we glimpse what we have not dared to be and yet desire to be.
Sebastian Moore OSB.*

As a Spiritual Director, I listen to courageous women and men. I receive from their resistance, confusion, impasses and inevitable personal struggles, some wonderful learning. Their lives of faith have challenged my own.

I attend to what's presented: stress and timetabling, relationships and commitment, forgiveness and personal healing, parenting and human anxieties, self-esteem and grief, ambition and employment.

Yet beneath all the apparent priorities of the moment, there's always a deeper more eternal agenda – listening to their experience of God. In some rather confronting sessions, my teachers in this ministry¹ insisted our concern as 'would-be Spiritual Directors' is always to be focused on the prayer experience of the person. I've come to appreciate how right they were.

You see we are all in this together and the further along we travel in prayer, the more we long to discover. To want Spiritual Direction is, after all, a courageous desire. We have to let go – to risk leaving the small familiar prison of self to meet the challenge of living more for others.

And in all this, I remain puzzled. Why do I still continue to have to learn the importance of letting go? After all these years, wouldn't you think I'd have got this by now! Yet, I can still hold on with great determination, mistakenly believing God's left me behind until suddenly, I spot some fallen kowhai flower on the lawn, and in that noticing, sense myself letting go. The gifts of peace, energy and new tenderness emerge to enable me to become present again. Independence seamlessly gives way to refreshing mutuality.

I smile as I write because it's all too familiar. Maybe I really do belong in the 'slow learners group'!

As Directors or Directees, letting go, letting be, and waiting in Christ, all require some serious cultural unlearning – if not sheer feisty resistance. And these spiritual practices run counter to society's fascination with self, self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and being 'self-made'.

But in letting go, I admit 'God is' and moreover, God does love me. It's an insight that startles. God's self-giving addresses me personally and at my innermost core. It's God's gift. When I let go, I'm more able to see it. And I can go on living my ordinary life in a more gracious and generous way.

I'm on this journey because of Jesus. I have a good number of books on Jesus. Presently I'm thoroughly enjoying Jose Pagola's, *Jesus: an historical approximation*. I have a dream of maybe one day writing my own.

I resonate with Elizabeth Johnson 'that to consider Jesus is always an exceedingly good experience.' Finally, it is experience that matters. Underneath all my reading, dreaming, and reflection, it's the effervescent experience of Jesus which astounds me, gives me life and impels me outwards.

To experience Jesus is to be astonished with love. In the presence of love I am urged to respond. I let the old ego die just a little more.

It is a gradual process – a pilgrimage. To experience Jesus is to feel myself changing again and again. In the face of love we always do. And my yes never stops arguing with a relentless no. So many choices I've made and the way I choose to live as a priest are derived from all of this. Trust me, it may not always be comfortable, but it is always about living deeply. As St Paul invites in what I consider to be by far the most challenging words of the New Testament, 'Have in you the mind of Christ Jesus...'

In the final analysis, we have no idea what life will demand of us. Often situations don't work out the way we hoped. Life is not ours. After disappointment, I've come to a much deeper place of waiting, letting go and yielding to trust.

Over time I've grown to respect the word 'allow'. In allowing what is, I've grown to understand that God is mystery. Not out there beyond or above the Southern Cross in our night sky, but actually in the midst of what is.

Like waiting for my eyes to adjust at night, I'm learning to wait in order to see again. In allowing or yielding, waiting or surrendering, I learn I'm alive in God's universe – not solemnly invoking God into my wee world.

God is forever reaching out to all of us with an incomprehensible love and calling us beyond our self to love one another. In our listening to others and to ourselves we catch a glimpse of the One who saves and sense our desire to be more like him.

My most faithful companion in helping me catch a glimpse of Jesus is, without doubt, *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola*. In what's really more a work-book than a treatise, I'm helped to keep my eyes, ears and heart open to the experience of him. And no matter how fleeting the glimpses might be, they are enough. They are more real than anything else and my life can then continue to be sourced in him. As I wait in Jesus, Sebastian Moore's remark comes back to me, since it's in the glimpse of him that I do see what I long to be and yet somehow avoid fully being.

**To experience Jesus
is to be astonished
with love.**

¹ Bill Connolly SJ and Madeline Birmingham RC through many hours at St Louis University



Waiting God

by Margaret Dunn

Pregnant silence, so full of expectancy,
Empty of sound
Full of You,
 Waiting,
 Waiting,
 Waiting to be received.

Glistening dew, delicately transparent,
Quivering gentleness,
Your Grace,
 Waiting,
 Waiting,
 Waiting to be absorbed.

Exquisite fragrance, suspended presence,
Unseen,
Your Beauty,
 Waiting,
 Waiting,
 Waiting to be breathed.

Caressing sun, warming depth,
Displacing cold,
Your Love,
 Waiting,
 Waiting,
 Waiting to restore.

Vibrant stillness, restoring fragmentation,
Bringing poise,
God,
 Waiting,
 Waiting,
 Waiting to love.

Expectant Trust

by Joanne Furgusson

I'm waiting with expectant trust
to see what God has planned
I stand before for his loving gaze
my heart in out stretched hand.

My Father is a loving God
He knows what's best for me
I lay my healing at his feet
resting while I wait and see.

In the past I struggled
to get the promise of my dream
I prayed with all my might
to receive what can't be seen.

But now I lay the promise down
I'm resting in God's love
He knows the plans he has for me
recorded there in Heaven above.

Perhaps He'll give the promise back
I really can not say
but what He does is up to Him
I'll trust Him and obey.

The desire of my heart
is lost within His grace
now it does not matter
as I gaze upon His face.

I love my heavenly Father
who is my mother too
so even if the harvest fails
I'll still trust what God will do.

Joanne wrote this poem, in 2003 in relation to her marriage, but as she's recently been diagnosed with advanced cancer, she changed it a little, to fit her current circumstances.

Waiting to know and knowing to wait

by Johannes Sijbrant

The importance of 'waiting' in personal, social and spiritual growth.

'Waiting for God' has an acknowledged place in Christian contemplative spirituality. In waiting, God's intentions, directions, and questions are revealed to the human spirit, and made conscious. As we contemplate in spirit and in truth, God reveals things of Himself, and ourselves. Alongside other spiritual disciplines and learning, we are led to become 'spiritual people', to develop a 'spiritual identity'. We receive spiritual birth through the Holy Spirit, and apply that identity as practicing believers.

It's a process mirrored in early human development as a mother waits for the emerging birth of her baby's 'self'. She gazes down, especially when feeding. She watches her baby's expressions, sounds and movements. Soon she recognizes deeply her baby's needs and feelings and finds within herself vocalizations and intonations to give her baby. In turn, her baby gazes upwards perceiving with delight his mother's revelations about himself. As a result of this interaction, the baby develops a sense of self.

This mutual process is a dialogue of watching and perceiving. As spiritual and emotional selves are recognised, mother and child move into attachment and then into bonding. For the baby, a sense of self is born and experienced in relationship.

As mother and baby watch and reflect back to each other at a pre-verbal level, they wait in dedicated receptivity for the very earliest signs of needs and feelings. Attachment and bonding ultimately depend on this waiting stage preceding conscious communication. And the product of this 'incubation' stage is the articulation of the self: a post-birth psychic equivalent to the emerging human form in utero which must precede a full term birth.

Attachment and a self-articulating identity are only possible with this mutual waiting: seeing and being seen, watching, expressing, responding. The quality of attachment governs much of the brain development, psychic-growth, internal organization and health-of-the-self this baby will display in ensuing years. Quality attachment precedes effective being and functioning, just as adverse conditions lead to ineffective ways of being, and to dysfunction.

When babies and children are deprived of someone who unconditionally practices acceptance, understanding, and support, they develop the capacity not to experience their feelings, because they can only *experience* their feelings when there's someone around to watch and respond. They may come to hate their own needs and feelings, leaving them uncomfortable with a distorted self-image.

When they fear losing parental love, their emotions may be repressed, resented or even considered with contempt. These uncomfortable emotions will surface later in life when re-experienced outside the original context. Reconnection with the event can be

effected in relationship with a skilled psychotherapist, pastoral counselor or spiritual director. When the mature person's inner child finally meets someone who's available to him, who can give belated acceptance, understanding and support, hopefully the symptoms resulting from repression will be healed.

In the same way, adolescents are in a stage where the adult is born in the child and parents are again required to learn to wait. The same mutual, transparent, observant and reflective relationship is needed to form these youngsters' unique identity. Their needs and feelings are often partly hidden, subconscious, held back by shame, guilt, anxiety, jealousy, hurt, anger or loneliness. Parents communicate inadequate waiting and knowing in a variety of ways – they

- choose only that which is convenient to themselves.
- carry a residue of deprivation they never dealt with.
- make themselves the centre of attention.
- don't wish to be made to feel insecure.
- offer only conditional love and acceptance.
- praise their child for denying their selves or their longings.
- are jealous of their child or adolescent.
- resent their child for being dependent on them.
- dislike their child because he triggers their own unresolved childhood issues.
- demand their child accommodate *their* needs.
- aren't aware of their child's primary need to be regarded and respected as a *whole* person.
- demand that their child continuously achieves at a high level.
- deny the pain and struggle their child experiences learning, socializing or performing.
- express contempt because their child is embarrassing them by being a child.
- live their dreams and goals through their children's lives.
- refuse to acknowledge their kids are adults and continue to treat them as children.

Unfortunately these behaviours often have a long history where 'non-waiting' was an issue from early days onwards. If parents had allowed waiting to play an honest and equal part in determining 'what happens next', the child's self-identity might have developed differently. In a relationship of understanding, a child's energy to grow and

thrive and respect others is practiced as *they* communicate their wants, needs and feelings directly with their parents. It's helpful when parental involvement proceeds without reacting, intruding, interrupting, expressing opinion or judgment.

Parents need to trust that open intellectual and emotional communication will lead to a *perceptive responding*. Mutual exploration and understatement bring far better understanding and relationship than the voicing of opinion and overstatement. Emotional intimacy requires the sharing of strong emotion and the provision of structure with youngsters, whether son, daughter, foster or adopted child, relative or little friend. When the adult waits, it allows a younger person to experience taking the lead, *irrespective* of their age. [Of course, adults should intervene where discipline, safety or the requirements of the law are at stake.]

It's part of waiting for the adult to ask themselves, 'What did I feel, observe, and think?' This allows the child to take the lead. Here authority is *given* to the adult – who decides to wait. And so the relationship deepens and the capacity for mutual understanding increases.

There will be thoughtful silences. Loss, fear of abandonment, anxiety, sadness, anger and loneliness will ultimately be communicated, and this self-disclosure is a sign of growing confidence in the strength of the relationship. As the adult gives recognition to these feelings, the child identifies with the adult and feels a significant partner in the relationship.

Some of the child's longings are released from secrecy and reconciled to the self. Soon humour and fun will be psychologically safe in the relationship, with plenty of opportunity for the spiritual to develop from where it first began.

All this allows parents to learn something about themselves that may need attention. And this is one of many ways in which the child blesses the adult.

In the Christian community, a place of significance is to be given to any child or adolescent. Our Lord gave several examples of how He offered esteem to a child.

Children and adolescents who feel valued and confident in the presence of adults teach us to be 'as children', to be vulnerable before God and trust Him without reservation, to tell Him everything, even things we don't want to talk about.

Children teach us to allow God to see our hurt, shame, and anxiety, to be there in the present moment with God, to accept and integrate into our personality, emotions we avoid and fear. They teach us to admit our failures, blind spots, limitations and disabilities allowing God access to them all. They teach us to recognize, enter and explore the hidden depths of our hearts without fear before God our Father.

To learn this from our youngsters, we must dare to enter into an honest relationship with them by waiting perceptively and engaging fully with whatever follows.

Lamentations 3:21-26

21 Yet this I call to mind

and therefore I have hope:

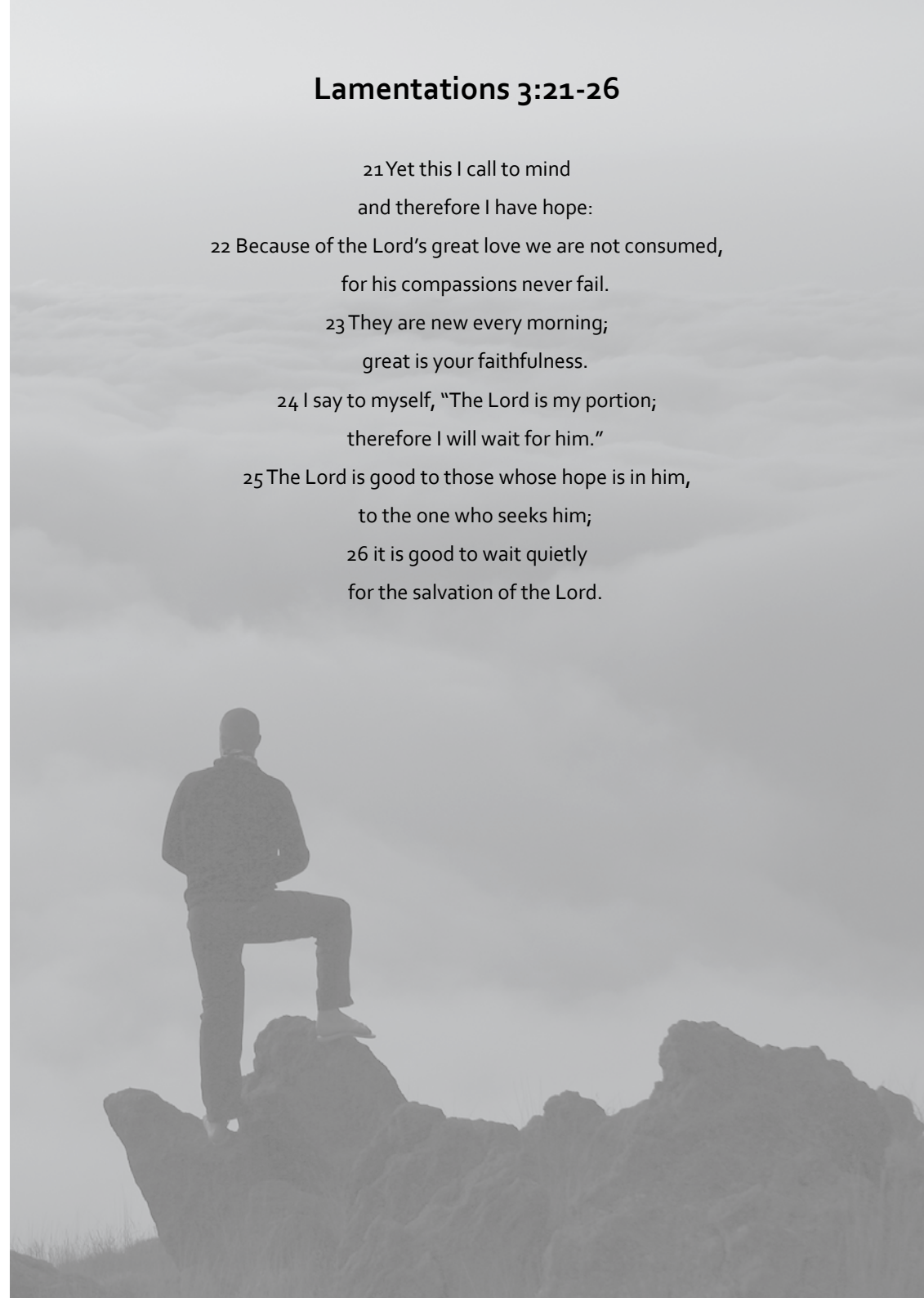
22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

23 They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

24 I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

25 The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;

26 it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.



Psalm 37:34

by Anna Johnstone

Don't be impatient for the Lord to act! Keep travelling steadily along his pathway and in due season he will honour you with every blessing.

Moses had it easy, really
even if stone slabs
were a bit heavy
to lug about

I think of others you
gave specific instructions to
and remember Noah

There's no way he could
have built the ark
Without precise measurements
from you, God
even if the thought
of such a huge craft
nearly blew his mind

Joshua and the troops
knew exactly how many times
to circle Jericho
and Paul knew the street
he had to go straight to
even if he couldn't
find it himself

I think I'm trying
to persuade you, God
that we need a hand here
or a word, actually

It wouldn't hurt
to break the silence
to give us a clue
or to come right out with it

You smile gently
and I sigh

So, no voice
in the thunder?
No writing on the wall?

It feels like one of those
tense TV dramas
where the clock is ticking
and there are impossible things
to be discovered in
an impossibly short time

But you say
you've never
been late yet

That nothing's
got away from you

That really, everything
is fine

I sigh again, reluctantly
back at base camp
till the weather clears
and I can see
the summit

Easter Saturday waiting divine busyness vs. congregational anxiety by Geoff New

Waiting on God. My first thought, if not instinct, when I hear that phrase is of an individual giving quiet, focused attention to God. A person being still and receptive as the Spirit speaks and moves within their spirit. Waiting on God by the Christian rather than the church.

Recently, I've changed my mind.

I'm a pastor and I've had occasion to encourage my congregation to wait because I was fresh out of ideas of what else to do. The previous year had been the worst I'd encountered in fifteen pastoring this church; for the church, the worst they'd faced in fifty-four – since they were established.

A gravely sinful and profoundly distressing incident occurred in our community. Its impact was further compounded by a swarm of changes forced upon us. Long-serving pastoral staff moved on; influential members moved town; leaders in crucial roles stepped down. While all these changes happened for good reasons, they took their toll on our present and future life as a community. It had been a year marked by death. What to do?

As I reflected on the events which wounded, bruised and cut us, it occurred to me a particular day in history gave voice to our state. That day? The Saturday during the events of the first Easter. The day stranded between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Saturday.

Scripture does not specifically describe the state of the disciples on that day but from the rest of the narrative we know they did not expect the events of Good Friday much less the events of Easter Sunday. They were stranded between grief and unexpected joy. Between darkness and unimagined light. Between death and resurrection. Stranded.

That's what I told my congregation. I told them we were in Easter Saturday because the texture of our community soul was the same – bewildered.

It struck me also there was a name for this Saturday: Sabbath. So for all of this, at the heart of it, we rest. Sabbath. A special Sabbath because the next day is Easter Sunday. Resurrection Day.

It's a curious thing but churches don't like rest. We don't like to wait. Anxiety runs through our veins – because unless we're busy we seem to think the law of entropy (i.e. left alone, the clock will run down) applies to the church.

We think the law of entropy will take us back to Genesis 1:2; 'Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep.'

We think the law of entropy is pre-eminent. It isn't. Sometimes the only thing left to

do is to do nothing. This is simply an acknowledgement of human limitation and divine activity.

Or to put it bluntly: humans die, God resurrects. Genesis 1:2 is preceded by verse 1, 'In the beginning God created' and succeeded by the end of verse 2, 'and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.' And this is reinforced by John 1:1-4. God is there. Always has been. Always will be. Always is.

And always the darkness cannot overcome the divine light. So when as a church, circumstances brutally shoved us through a Good Friday, what else could we do? We waited for Resurrection Sunday. We purposefully stilled the temptation to panic and endeavoured to be still.

The eldership of the church reflected on all that had happened and decided to be prayerfully still and to thank God. We needed Luke 24:15 to play out – 'While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them.'

About six weeks after realising exactly which day of the week we were in, Resurrection Sunday dawned. Our present mission received new life in the form of utterly unexpected offers of help and assistance from within and without the congregation. Life exploded.

At the time of writing, we're yet to have our first elders' meeting following Resurrection Sunday. When we meet we'll begin our time with prayer as we usually do. However, we will continue to wait on God. We will not say much. We will be still with each other and before the Head of the Church. We will sit with the knowledge of all that has happened. The death and the life. The darkness and the light. The cross and the tomb (the empty one). We may sit with the observation that 'to say God is "Trinity" is to say God is busy in the world.'¹

I have no church growth technique to market as a result of this experience. No formula. No ten-step recipe. Just an image. A bruised and bewildered congregation stranded and forced to rest on Easter Sabbath, while the Head of the Church goes about the creation of Easter Sunday. Again.

He doesn't tire of it. And nor should His church.

As I reflected on the events which wounded, bruised and cut us, it occurred to me a particular day in history gave voice to our state.



¹ Brackley, Dean (2004), *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad), 227.

Sarai

by Jo Anastasiatis

Waiting

10 years, 20 years, 30, 40 ...

But no son.

Then the promise: *"I will make you into a great nation."*

At age 65

Beautiful enough for Pharaoh's wife

But no son.

Protected from adultery by God

But no son.

Another promise: *"Your offspring will be as the stars"*

But no son.

10 years on from the promise first given

Still no son.

Questions, doubts, plans, contingencies

Another way: a surrogate.

But spite, jealousy, hatred, cruelty are also born

Along with a son

But not of my womb.

Silence.

For 14 years more

Silence.

And still no son of my womb.

The final promise:

"I will greatly increase your numbers;"

"I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you."

And

"I will bless Sarah and will surely give you a son by her."

"She will be the mother of nations, kings will come from her."

A new name, perhaps,

But I have no hope left, only cynicism.

Still at age 89

Desirable enough for a King's harem

Again protected by God from adultery

And one year later ... finally, finally,

A son of my own body.

The son of the promise some 25 years earlier.

... Laughter ...

50 years, 60, 70 ...

Awaiting.

Waiting and signs of grace

by Anne Hadfield

Waiting is becoming a rare experience in a culture which expects instant gratification and service. We're far removed from the natural rhythms of sunrise and sunset, sowing and harvesting described in the Gospels. Many no longer have gardens or first-hand experience of sowing seed, waiting for the shoot to appear and the crop to mature. Most of us don't start the day waiting for the yeast to rise so we can bake bread.

In our urbanized, consumerist world, perhaps the most meaningful image left to us is the one of being born and giving birth, though sometimes surgical interventions have even modified this process.

Yet waiting is an integral part of the Creator's process of growth.

When a woman falls pregnant, amazing physical and emotional changes take place. Every organ is impacted as her body prepares for the birth. When a man waits to become a father, his relationship with his partner has to alter to accommodate a third person in his life. Like Joseph, he's invited to go on a journey, to take more responsibility, and adapt from being in partnership to being a family.

**The paradox is while the
body is ageing, the passion
and the spirit are growing
stronger.**

In the natural process, neither the man nor the woman can programme the exact moment the wondrous miracle that will change their lives will take place. A child is born.

The natural process mirrors the spiritual process. Without the experience of waiting we won't be ready for the next stage of our lives. We may not know we've missed the mark. We may be unaware that moments of grace are all around us. God longs to be in deeper relationship with us. God bids us notice the divine presence through our senses, our minds and our hearts. Our souls are invited to prepare for a deeper birth of Spirit within us.

But what are we waiting for? Especially in prayer it can seem more satisfying to petition and intercede and so 'do' something. Waiting in silence without words may seem less meaningful.

Yet only in waiting prayer do we become aware of our blockages to growth – like our ideas of how things will happen. We learned this about seven years ago. We'd already sold our house and were fixed on buying in a certain suburb for family reasons. We endured being homeless and jobless and increased stress before we were able to let go our preconceived ideas and wait.

When we were ready, a house with the gift of beautiful sea views in a far suburb appeared. Here, our souls are nourished by beauty every day. Even more humbling was an invitation from the vendors to accompany them through deep times as they faced

illness and death. A profound friendship continues with the surviving partner. How could we have ever imagined that future?

Waiting sorts out our motivations. Paul of Tarsus certainly knew what struggle occurs when our ego tries to play god. Over time, a mirror is held up for us so we can see ourselves – not as others do – but as God does. That can make all the difference. And in the freedom that results, all the frustration, anger and disappointment we knew when our ego was in charge, can turn to joy.

Waiting prepares us for a deeper, God-centered life. We're prepared for grace to appear in myriad forms – even through nature. Recently, after a prayer session for guidance on a decision, we opened our eyes to see a tui looking straight at us from a kaka-beak bush just two metres away. Such grace-filled moments come with an insight, a conversation, a piece of music, a sense of God's word to us, or an awareness of space filled with a Presence beyond any description.

In Psalm 46 we're invited to 'Be still and know that I am God'. But this exhortation isn't for some perfect world. Instead, the psalmist speaks of 'earthquakes' and 'tsunamis' and nations in uproar. But being still isn't easy in our contemporary world. It takes discipline to make time and a conscious slowing down, to practise listening to and being with God in non-verbal prayer.

Apophatic prayer, using Christian meditation or Centering Prayer, can be very helpful in preparing us for a deeper, more contemplative life with God. In waiting before God, we bring our whole selves like empty vessels, receptive and open to the birth of the Spirit again and again within us.

For me, in semi-retirement, that means investing more time in contemplation and mentoring, and more of my energies in being. The paradox is, while the body is ageing, the passion and the spirit are growing stronger. Whether we use Eckhart's image of god-seed growing into God, or Hildegard's image of greening – in waiting – that process starts now.

One day, like everyone else, I will face a passing through death into life in God. Our longing and experience of waiting prepares us for that moment of mystery – our ultimate birth. As Thomas Merton said, we can start living that life now.

The important thing in contemplation is not gratification and rest but awareness, life, creativity and freedom.¹

¹ Cunningham. Lawrence S. 1992. Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master. Paulist Press. Mahwah, N.J. p3251

A useful website: <http://www.wccm.org>



Waiting and the Nature of Contemplation

by Andrew Pritchard

Contemplation, contemplative spirituality, contemplative prayer ...

What are you aware of as you read these words? What thoughts come to your mind?

What emotions surface in you? What bodily response? And what does any of this have to do with waiting?

Some thoughts - a wandering and a wondering.

Contemplate comes from the Latin *contempatio* with the root word *templum* – the sacred meeting place. This Latin word translates the Greek *theoria* to meet or to see God. So to contemplate is to meet God in the sacred place.

Contemplation is about meeting God: mutual, two-way, 'I-THOU' relationship. Two free subjects, responding to one another. So, contemplation grows, develops, and changes as each perceives and responds to the other: an unscripted dance, where the music, rhythm, tempo and steps aren't laid down in advance, but emerge from the depth of the two and become one. This is a sacred place, a holy place. We know this in our own experience and we know it from the experience of mothers and fathers of faith in scripture and throughout history.

- Jacob, head on a stone, who dreamed of a ladder, wrestled till day-break without prevailing and left with a limp. *'Behold, this was a sacred place and I never knew it.'*
- Moses, who saw a burning bush, discovered holy ground, met I AM and left his flock of sheep to lead chosen people out of captivity to promise.
- Ruth, who clung to Naomi, whose yearning for Naomi's God to be her God was fulfilled. Ruth who lay silently at Boaz' feet and became David's great grand-mother.
- Mary, whose perplexed, *'how can this be?'* became, *'here I am, God's servant, let it be with me according to your word.'* Mary, who nurturing Jesus to manhood, *'pondered all these things in her heart'*, who drew Jesus to public ministry with, *'They have no wine.'* and, *'Do whatever he tells you.'*

In contemplation we discover we're in a sacred, holy, place with God. Like Moses we may take off our shoes, kneel, bow – find some way for our embodied self to accept the reality and intimacy of this meeting. Meeting God in the holy place can be overwhelming. Like Peter, James and John at the transfiguration, our response may be to 'dial this down a bit', to make this more normal, more manageable, try to seize the initiative, build a memorial, or to fall to the ground terrified.

A further understanding of contemplation is: to gaze, to look at steadily, to look deeply into. With practice we learn to notice more, stay with it, look more deeply, listen more acutely and perceive more sensitively. Humility, naiveté and a desire to learn will support our capacity to do this; as will owning our 'unknowing', asking the 'other' to speak its

truth, wanting to grow.

Jesus' example is so instructive here:

- seeing one person in a multitude, one crippled man at the pool
- writing in the dust surrounded by vindictive self-righteous men with the life of a condemned woman at stake
- feeling the power leave him through one faithful touch in a heaving, jostling crowd
- always communing with Abba

Contemplating comes naturally, but not easily. We're born contemplative!

Watch a baby explore his or her world long before they can move around alone; eyes, ears, mouth, breath, and touch alive to discover and receive. And deeper yet the inner person is vibrant and alive.

This early unfettered openness is lost in varying degrees as we grow. The necessary and good influence of family, culture, community, tradition has a down side. In learning to relate to the world, learning to negotiate and manage, our natural contemplative nature is balanced with attributes and abilities that allow us to modify and control our world – not just imbibe it.

an unscripted dance,
where the music, rhythm,
tempo and steps aren't laid
down in advance

In a technological, urbanised society we become habituated to control, or at least to try to. Our contemplative nature has atrophied like the kiwi's wings! Even in Jesus' day his *'unless you become like little children'* suggests the move from contemplation to control was well advanced. As I said, natural but not easy!

As adults most of us have to learn, or more accurately, to remember, how to contemplate and this takes practice. It's made easier by guides who've gone before us and friends who travel with us to support us on the journey.

The core of SGM's work is to provide resources for people exploring the contemplative path in the Christian tradition, and to form spiritual directors who can share the journey with them. The World Centre for Christian Meditation and Contemplative Outreach are two other organisations who provide support and contemplative resources. And around the world, the number of local groups who meet for contemplative prayer continues to grow.

So what does any of this have to do with waiting?

For me, waiting is the very essence and nature of contemplation. Gazing deeply takes time. And the two-way, mutual, I – THOU encounter is consummated when both parties are ready, not to the schedule of one alone. The Song of Songs illustrates this so well in the approach, disappearance and discovery of lover and beloved.

Is the waiting worth it? Absolutely!

An Awakening

by Valerie Roberts

When I read the next edition of Refresh was on the theme of waiting, images began hopping around in my mind. Growing up in East Africa, waiting was an inevitable part of daily life. Waiting in queues for petrol during shortages, waiting for hours that often became days in Government offices, waiting for the bus in rush hour, for rain when the maize had shrivelled up, for the electricity to return during another power cut, waiting for the telephone lines to be fixed. Watching and waiting as quietly as possible in the back of the dusty car in the National Park for the rhino and its baby to emerge from the scrub.

Sometimes the wait would be rewarded, sometimes not.

And there's the waiting we all face at some time in our lives: for exam results, medical tests, the outcome of a job interview, convalescence, childbirth, and dying. Waiting is not something we easily embrace. Rather, it irritates us, causes us stress or anxiety.

We naturally want to fight the inconvenience and uncertainty. We invent ways to avoid the wait, like changing TV channels or radio stations, buying now on hire purchase, the drive thru at McDonald's. But there are limits. Mostly we have no choice but to wait it out. As anyone who suffers insomnia knows! Psalm 130:6 captures it, 'My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning...'

The natural world shows us a different way. Everything has its time and season and can't be rushed. The process of growing older and accepting life's challenges and changes teaches me waiting is part of the journey. I'm learning to accept it a bit better, by paying attention to nature's seasons and cycles, practising patience and cultivating an awareness of the present moment.

I thought I was doing pretty well, when suddenly my plans for Christmas were completely knocked over and into the 'out of my control' basket. Instead of enjoying a family celebration of my sister's visit from England, I found myself working out how soon I could fly to Auckland to visit her - in hospital. She'd had a serious stroke.

Waiting for news of her condition each day became very personal. I began to glimpse the unknowable duration of the slow process of recovery. Waiting became tangible as I sat for hours at a time with my brother-in-law by my sister's side. She slept and rested most of the time, exhausted by the smallest effort to communicate, move or eat. Time for her became blurred and for me, reduced to the now.

Gradually my praying has become more and more empty of thoughts or words. At times I fear it's not prayer at all, just a vacuum where words were at least some form of connection with God. But sitting in the ward, removed from my daily obligations, and few thoughts taking me to the 'next thing', I had a new awareness of just being in the present. It was surprisingly peaceful. While the rational part of me said that's not real prayer, another part of me was aware of emerging epiphany.

My prayer is my presence. For family members overseas, I represented their presence. Perhaps in the metaphor of an angel, I was representing Christ.

After many years reflecting on Advent, I learned Christ comes in unexpected ways in unexpected places. Christ came to me in the vulnerability of one of my sisters in a hospital bed. Indeed I believe we were Christ to each other. For me Christmas was transformed – a time to allow God.

I can't help but wonder at the way events unfolded and the good things that have already emerged from this experience of waiting. A painting I began during Advent 2011, which I called 'Waiting in Hope', was sitting unfinished in a cupboard in my study. I was sure I would finish it during Advent 2012. It wasn't the right time. Why? I believe it's because now it's become real.

It's about waiting for recovery, new life, new light; a new resurrection that only God can see as we co-operate in the season of waiting. Now this painting will become my prayer for my sister and our family.

I wrote this article mid-January and finished the painting a month later.

My sister is recovering well at home in England.

Waiting as awakening
© Valerie Roberts



Patient waiting

by Martin Stewart

I'm an impatient chap at the best of times – when I fasten onto something I want to get on with it. This is a troublesome problem especially in an age of consumerism where people like me become fodder for marketing and promises of quick fixes.

God doesn't fit my tendencies. Thank God, God doesn't fit my tendencies!

Instead, God demands/commands/cajoles us into waiting – waiting for God's larger framework to be revealed – for Jesus' kingdom of heaven to unfold among us.

From time to time I play a game of pretense, that my getting on with it is in line with God's will. Yes, sometimes there are signs that what I'm involved in has God's flavour to it – I've enough past sense of God's ways to step out in trust. But often I pretend I know when I don't, because I'm impatient and unwilling to wait. Yet waiting is another dimension of trust.

The earthquake sequence in Christchurch demanded waiting. For some days following the two major events, there wasn't much more to do than wait. It's not like there was nothing to do, but other infinitely more qualified people were doing it. Shops were closed. Electricity was out or intermittent. We were encouraged to keep off the roads unless we really had to go out.

Even after phone calls and checking in on older folks (I had time to ring every person in my parish and most of my colleagues!) there was still waiting.

In the waiting were some gifts – new dimensions of aroha among family and friends. And time! Time for neighbours, with whom I'd only a wave-if-we-were-passing acquaintance prior to the quakes. Time to think about fear and adrenalin and my reflex to run. Time to grow. Time to sharpen my theology (there was so much poor, foul-smelling theology about the place, this part was relatively easy – I observed the liquefaction oozed all kinds of stuff that was better left buried!). And time to pray.

And then suddenly a great wave of quake-related tasks and demands flooded my life for the next two years. Looking back, I'm deeply grateful for those two or three days of quiet in the immediate aftermath of the two largest quakes. I see now, how in that time of waiting, I was being prepared.

I still have many tendencies towards impatience. Anne tells me I seem to be quite quick to participate in things – maybe too quick sometimes. But I do believe I've become more trusting of the bigger picture of God's economy. Not everything has to be sorted, nor everything attended to, nor every battle won.

God's framework was and is and always will be – larger and broader – and things will get 'handled' in time.

One of the beautiful grace-filled gifts that manifested in Christchurch around the earthquake sequences was the way people made room for each other. For some months afterward there was a carefulness and patience among the bulk of the populace.

This 'making room' manifested in neighbourhood get-togethers, and numerous acts of generosity and hospitality. But our 'making room' was most commonly expressed in how we managed ourselves in traffic – waving and smiling as people willingly let others into traffic lines – as though the city became a village. Suddenly there was an intimacy and a grace.

All this uplifted my heart and encouraged a level of patience in me I now try to practise on a daily basis. And though I notice some of that spirit has now gone, I hope the committed core of practising patience and kindness will continue to change how we are together – without having to endure calamity. I like the idea of waiting on people as our Christian posture in the world.

What happened while I was waiting for something else to happen

by Margaret Tooley

Sometimes I think I've spent the last four years waiting. The story is simple: in January 2009, I suffered a seizure and ended up in hospital with a diagnosis of complex partial epilepsy. Sounds impressive, but actually, it's just a bother.

It means I can't drive. Hence the waiting – standing by the roadside waiting for someone to pick me up; depending on someone else's busy schedule; waiting for someone to finish a task so they can take me where I need to go. (Wants have largely been forgotten, but that's another story.) So what have I discerned in the waiting room?

Patience happens in the waiting. When the virtue of patience was handed out, I was probably too impatient to wait in line. Now I'm learning. Patience means you slow down. It's astonishing what you see, hear, taste, feel and smell. Perhaps it is trite to say the grape tastes sweeter, the tui's song's more haunting, the pohutakawa's vermilion more brilliant. Trite perhaps, but true. Waiting awakens the pleasure of what is, and the pang of what is yet to be.

Faith happens in the waiting. Hebrews 11 gives us the great Hall of Fame of Bible heroes; Abraham waited for a son, Noah waited for the flood, Moses waited in the wilderness, Joseph waited in prison – their lives all marked by waiting – whether 99, 120 or 40 years. And there are others: Simeon in the Temple, Elizabeth in her barrenness, the disciples waiting for Jesus to reveal his mission.

Jesus' parables are full of such metaphors: waiting for the seed to grow, the yeast to rise, or the prodigal to come home. I've learned faith and waiting are inseparable. Active, yearning, and hope-filled; this is the waiting in which faith is born and borne.

God happens in the waiting. Once my illness was diagnosed, there was no shortage of dear, helpful people eager to take me to a healing meeting, or to hear a particular preacher, or to go up on a healing line; some convinced that it was God's will to give me an immediate and dramatic healing.

I was (and am) grateful for their love and help, and keen to attend. So far healing hasn't happened. To some who believe it's God's will to instantly heal, there must be a reason. Perhaps I haven't believed enough, or fasted enough, or prayed enough; perhaps there is a lack of desperation, some secret sin needing repentance or a demon that needs casting out. And to some, I am an embarrassment.

Yes, I do believe in healing, and pray for healing. And yes, I welcome and take opportunities to receive prayer, to sit in a healing room or join a healing line. But I soon discovered the search for healing can become obsessive and dominating, controlling and self-referential. It can prevent me from taking time to sit with another, attentive to their story, discerning their heart and listening with them, for God.

Surely this ministry of spiritual direction demands from us a 'dying to self' that is impossible when we're caught up in our own needs. The quest for healing can easily become a preoccupation that stifles the purposes of God happening in me and through me. When that happens it truly is 'all about me' – the deadliest spiritual sickness.

As I sit with a directee, lost in their story and searching for God, I'm at my most whole. Perhaps I am also at my most healed.

When I did stop, and wait, and listen, the words that came to me from God were 'Do what you can, not what you can't.' And there's so much I can do; make new space for God, work with directees on email in faraway corners of the earth, deepen my prayer life, develop gifts I'd neglected and discover new ones, be a home for those who have no spiritual sense of 'home.'

My diagnosis has forced on me a sense of dependence I'd never have sought. As a dedicated introvert, driving alone was one of my great joys: on my own in my self-contained little world, free to pray aloud, or sing at the top of my voice (windows up of course).

Now I'm not driving, but being driven; now I don't sit alone, but with someone else. Now I can't revel in the silence but have to make conversation. Yet, as I hear the other's story, I stumble into God-moments, and together we explore the depths of spiritual life. Travelling together has become a metaphor for a spiritual travelling together. As a gift I did not seek, I value it even more highly.

They say an accomplished musician may be concerned with the notes, but is consumed by the silence between. That's where the magic happens; that's where waiting becomes art – that births transcendence. In the silence I hear the notes of another melody; in the waiting I hear the voice of God.

Yes, indeed, God does happen in the waiting.

**It's astonishing what you see,
hear, taste, feel and smell
when you slow down**

Waiting at Curio Bay. Catlins

by Carol Grant

Drowned by the ash-filled flood waters
of sudden catastrophe
and lashed by the storm- laden surges
from deep ocean currents,
the ancient trunks remain
fossilised, scattered,
silica encrusted,
growth rings exposed, weathered,
waiting
waiting
waiting . . .

Displaced by sudden disappointments
of external demands
and harried by the constant demands of concern
and expectation,
vision fragments remain, shattered,
hopes exposed, vulnerable,
weeping
weeping
weeping . . .

The touches of ocean spray,
the lick of the tides,
footsteps of the curious,
the pattering of the penguins,
and curving of the dolphins,
constant, living,
reminders
reminders
reminders . . .

Only the touches of loving presence
can persistently dissolve
the crusts of past mistakes
and frozen dreams
to renew the sap of life,
with gentleness,
flowing
flowing
flowing . . .



A Book of Silence

Reviewer Andrew Dunn

Author: Sara Maitland

Granta Books. 2008. pp 309

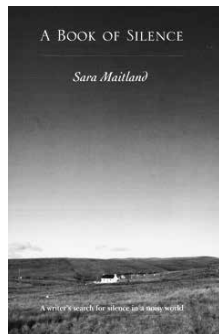
ISBN 978 1 84708 042 2

Here's a serious study of silence and solitude. Sara Maitland is a writer who has taken her desire for more and more silence to lengths most would not be able to do – she has become a hermit in the Scottish Highlands and has built a house in a lone landscape and there she lives out her sense of God's call to silence, prayer and writing.

Her study tells her story of her search for greater depth as a vicar's wife and how her long search took her through many experiences and experiments over the years.

There's psychology here, fruits from her wide reading (I've not heard of many of the writers she cites), and chapters on 'Growing up in a noisy world', 'Forty Days and Forty Nights' (her own experiments with isolation and silence on a lonely farm on the Isle of Skye). Then a significant study of the dark side of isolation and silence before a chapter on 'Silence and The Gods', on the role silence plays in various religious and cultural traditions, 'Silent Places' explores the importance of place in silence and developing the inner world of solitude. In 'Desert Hermits' Maitland describes her journeys to hermit locations like Sinai and similar places in Judaic and Christian experience. And finally her own new home designed to suit her solitary life of prayer and writing.

Here's a very wide-ranging study of silence and rich observations on the call to deepen in God in our noisy and intrusive world. I don't know of another book quite like it.



Speak Tenderly

Reviewer Libby Hinton

Author: Rosemary Poland

Publisher: www.speaktenderly.wordpress.com

Supplier: www.marsdenbooks.co.nz. Order by email

This book is a series of short reflections based on Rosemary's own journey since learning at 51 that she had a terminal brain cancer. She describes how hearing God's tender voice resounding in her particular "valley of trouble" opened wide a "door of hope".

Her book raises questions we ask ourselves when we or someone close to us is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. It has proved useful for people who have a relative with a terminal illness and are unsure how to approach them. It is very readable, totally inspiring, offering helpful insights, and provides much to ponder. It is useful for groups and individuals as focus study material as it has pertinent questions at the back.

It has been especially appreciated because of its size, bright photographs and dialogue that tackles topics succinctly.

Rosemary – wife, mother, Anglican priest, school chaplain, keen tramper and runner, died in January this year. I was a close friend, along with others, who accompanied Rosie, as she was to me, on her journey. Her book has already gone global and will continue to travel far as people value its wisdom and honesty. At a cost of two large flat whites I highly recommend it.



SGM News Winter 2013

Networking is on my mind. In part, because recently I helped run two workshops on *Resources for Personal Spiritual Formation* at a regional denominational event. I had opportunity to connect with over forty people, hear the value they place on spiritual growth for their own lives and ministries and offer tools and suggestions. It was great to be a catalyst enabling people to encourage and share their experience and resources with one another.

I found links with past Spiritual Direction Formation participants, others who attended retreats or quiet days offered by SGM, and a number who had never encountered SGM before. Certainly copies of our 2013 Calendar, Refresh and Formation Programme brochures were in high demand.

I also think about networking when I see the skeletal form of pruned fruit trees in our garden, or the veins that carried life in autumn leaves. Like this, Spiritual Growth Ministries is a distributed network of people who all play a vital part of the whole in ways that vary – some seen, some hidden, all important and all appreciated.

In the last eighteen months, two unexpected but vital bequests have arrived when grants weren't available. In uncertain financial times, such bequests are a huge encouragement along with the faithful financial support of our donors.

Twenty-three participants entered the Formation Programme this year, fifteen women and eight men: eleven from the South Island and Wellington meet in Christchurch for workshops, nine from the remainder of the North Island meet in Auckland, three are currently based overseas

As mentioned in the summer edition of SGM News, 2013 marks the 25th year of SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme and thirty years facilitating contemplative spiritual growth through retreats, quiet days, workshops, writing, speaking and prayer. Plans are well underway to celebrate these milestones and embrace the challenge of the years ahead!

In 2014, we'll hold a series of special events involving story, food, and laughter in Auckland, Palmerston North, Christchurch, and Dunedin (tentatively May 3, 10, 17, and 24, 10.00am-3.30pm) Anyone with a connection to SGM is invited. It will be a great opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues as we celebrate what's been achieved and commit to what lies ahead. While our mailing list is good we want details for as many interested people as possible. **If you know anyone with a connection to SGM over the years who may not be on our list, please encourage them to contact: SGM Administrator sgm@clear.net.nz, 36 Buller Crescent, Manurewa, Manukau 2102.**

Blessings
Andrew Pritchard, Convenor

Contributors

Jane Hansen is married to Jim, and is also mum and grandma. Jane enjoys country life close to the Wairere Falls beneath the Kaimai Ranges, visits from family and friends and writing in response to God's grace in the blessings and challenges of everyday life.

Judith Anne O'Sullivan is a Dominican Sister living in Community in Dunedin. Contemplation, reflecting with others on the daily Word of God and hospitality are central to the life of the Community. From this life style flows the great privilege of being a companion to others on their spiritual journey.

Bruce Hamill is a Neo-Anabaptist Presbyterian Minister in Dunedin, the obedient father of three girls, and husband of a local kindergarten teacher.

Mary Hepburn is a Sister of Mercy and Member of Dominican Family Community in Dunedin. Ministry includes spiritual direction and music therapy and continues to invite into new places, horizons, and blessings!

Kelvin Wright has been a parish priest for 30 years and a bishop for three. Contemplative prayer has been a source of strength for all his ministry but more particularly in the last five after a diagnosis of cancer.

Malcolm Gordon is a Presbyterian Minister, songwriter and storyteller. He recently left full-time parish ministry to give more room for writing, recording and inviting others to join the conversation of worship.

Mark Chamberlain has been involved in spiritual direction ministry and in the offering of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius for over twenty years. He is currently the parish priest of the Dunedin North Pastoral Area, and Chaplain to the University of Otago and the Dunedin Public Hospital.

Margaret Dunn lives at Oasis Retreat Centre, Albany, and enjoys this lovely patch of bush, and is passionate about designing and making quilts now that she has retired.

Johannes Sijbrant lives with his wife, Bea, in the Shalom community on the Kapiti Coast. He works as a counsellor and as a child and adolescent psychotherapist in private practice. They are part of St. Patrick's Catholic Parish in Paraparaumu.

Joanne Fergusson is National Director of Covenant Keepers NZ, a unique marriage healing ministry, supporting those who, though separated or divorced, choose to remain faithful to their marriage vows and trust God for the restoration of their marriage.

Anna Johnstone is a poet; she and her husband, Kerry, enjoy life on Auckland's North Shore and explore new paths of creativity. www.johnstone2.co.nz

Geoff New has been the minister of Papakura East & Hunua Presbyterian Church since 1997. Geoff's doctoral studies researched the impact of Lectio Divina and Ignatian Gospel Contemplation on sermon preparation.

Jo Anastasiadis is a born and bred Wellingtonian, wife, mother of grown children and spiritual director. She enjoys being outdoors, particularly walking on the beach, taking time out for retreats, and utilising creativity in her relationship with God. mail4jo@xtra.co.nz

Anne Hadfield was one of the founding members of Spiritual Growth Ministries. She held several positions in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and is now a spiritual director and supervisor in Mana, Porirua. Anne holds a PhD in Religious Studies from Victoria University.

Andrew Pritchard husband of 1, father of 3, grandfather of 1, loves God and life! Teaching, spiritual direction, supervision and administration fill his working days. Reading, listening to music, walking, playing golf and pottering in his shed are vital for his physical, mental and spiritual health!

Valerie Roberts is a spiritual director living on the Kapiti Coast with her husband and foster daughter. Valerie works in a pastoral role with L'Arche Kapiti, a community for adults with and without intellectual disabilities. She loves art and craft, reading and writing and enjoying God's creation.

Martin Stewart is a Presbyterian Minister based in Christchurch serving in a team with Anne, his wife. He has interests in photography, music, gardening and developing a recently purchased rural property. He blogs on www.marttherev.wordpress.com

Margaret Tooley lives in Auckland where she works as a spiritual director and church musician. She believes her most vital calling is to encourage others to discover and use their gifts for the glory of God.

Carol Grant is a retired parish minister, spiritual director, professional supervisor, and mentor of those journeying in faith.

Joy Cowley is a wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and child of God.

Tina Toschi serves on the Board and is a Spiritual Director for Walk to Emmaus ministries in New Zealand. While she also speaks at a number of conferences, she enjoys the quiet space at home in Auckland with her Creator, her husband and their cat.

Waiting

by Joy Cowley

This is how it works, my friend:
winter is the beginning of summer;
the shadow indicates sunshine;
and loss is preparation for gain.

How long it took me to learn this!
My eyes, trained to division,
failed to see the cycle of growth
until one long night of loss.
While sitting and waiting
for the sun to rise,
I discovered in my grief,
a touch of amazing light.

That, my friend, is when I learned
the secret working of our loving, God:
The darkness always serves the light.

The Last Word

In my twenties I had to learn to wait. In my thirties and wrestling with God – God seemed to be teaching me to learn to wait 'patiently'!

In my forties, God revolutionised my understanding of waiting altogether.

At that stage I sought to surrender 100% to God's will for me...not 99% or 98.5%.

I still do. But this desire brought with it a self-shattering question: 'what if what I want more than anything else in the world for myself, or for others, just isn't God's will? Am I still willing to surrender?' My answer was 'yes'.

And God said, 'then you must go beyond waiting.'

So how to pray 'beyond waiting'?

Paul sums it up for the church at Philippi, 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

What we are promised is not what we want, but the peace of Christ!

And that's enough for me.

Blessings

Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Summer 2014 Refresh

Theme: Meaning to live!

Contributions to the Summer Edition must be received by August 30, 2013.

The essence of this theme is choosing or seizing life within the context of our own journey or that of those to whom we minister. Particularly looking at those pivotal moments of decision when life seems darkest and we find we're standing in the blinding light of God's love – and we find meaning to continue on.

Writers please

keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words

images must be over 2 megabytes to be usable

use single quotation marks

conversational in style using conjunctions if possible

reference all quotations as endnotes