

## “WAITING FOR DAWN: *The Snare of Impatience*”

Isaiah 11:1-10 & Luke 1:5-23

December 8, 2013 ~ Rev. James Ramsey

Native peoples have long used snares to catch wild game. For smaller animals:

The Paiutes have the deadfall snare. The Apaches have the foot snare. The Ojibwas have the bird pole. And many tribes have used the most common and effective of snares, the simple loop snare. There are also snares for larger animals, such as deer, bear or wild boar. Native peoples used the



Treadle Spring Snare, the Bow Trap and the Spear Shaft, but had to be careful that they themselves or members of their tribe were not caught.

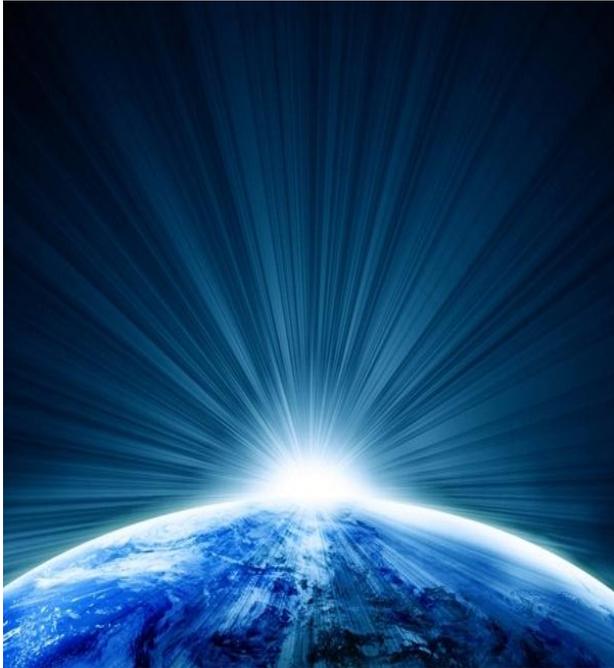


Robert Griffing, *Council at Slippery Rock Creek*, oil, 36 x 51 in.

The snare setter always warned his friends and family because he knew his traps could be lethal. He described the locations of his snares and instructed his people to always approach the area of the snare with caution, preferably from the rear.

Most of us know nothing of these snares. I consider myself an outdoorsman, but I have little knowledge of them – I had to turn to my go-to reference: “*Survival Wisdom and Know-How.*”

While a snare is a trap for catching birds or animals, often with some kind of slip noose or trigger, it can also be something out of the field and in our life, something that catches us unawares. During this holy season of Advent, I want to lift up the snare of impatience, something that threatens our spiritual life. We must keep watch, stay prepared so that we do not get caught.



More than any other time of year, during Advent, these weeks that lead up to Christmas, we seek to discover the grace of God. It is like waiting for the dawn – for the sun is coming, the Son of God will surely appear on our horizon.

But many of us find waiting difficult, whether at the grocery store, in traffic, at the hospital, or in a broader context... consequently, we are vulnerable to being tripped up by the snare of impatience.

How many of us lack patience? How many of us have an inability to find grace in waiting...an irritability...a frustration with anything that causes delay? Impatience first, but then annoyance, vexation, agitation, and, finally, pervasive restlessness.

Advent can be an important time for us -- for we are encouraged to find the kingdom of God unfolding in our lives, even while we are waiting.

We live in an active society, an impatient society. You might notice this at the mall this season, especially as we draw nearer to the holidays, the lines, the pushing, the frantic rush to acquire, to beat the deadline, to find the right gift, to cross off yet another item on the list.





You might notice it out on the highway, how people will shift lanes, with reckless disregard for their neighbors who share the road, simply because they imagine they will gain seconds on their journey. The speeding and the honking of horns, the close calls and near accidents, the little incidences of road rage.

You might notice it in a waiting room, how people sigh and grump, or how they fear the doctor's report, how they snap at the receptionist.

These are some examples of impatience. These and other annoyances can threaten our well-being and our relationship with God. Impatience may very well be an offense against the Advent spirit, an offense against the way that God wishes to come to us. We learn from the Christmas story that God wishes to come at his time, according to his own manner and his own will.



Zechariah learned this profound lesson. He had the honor of serving in the temple. He imagined how it would go. He likely had his plans and his expectations. God was about to do an amazing thing in his life – and in the life of Elizabeth his wife – and in the life of God's people – and in the life of the world. The angel's announcement brought fear and disbelief. Elizabeth would bear a son, an extraordinary prophet, who would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth, and would come to make ready a people prepared for God's Messiah.



God desires to come to us according to *his* time...not according to our plans and our schedules.

Genuine faith really is different than, say, the kind of enthusiasm generated by sporting

events or by a mob mentality. Genuine faith really must be discovered quietly, as Joseph, the silent carpenter, discovered it, and as Zechariah, the silent priest...

as in when we lay aside our agendas

And our plans

And our schedules

And permit God to work according to his time and his season.

***What a difference in the quality of our waiting when we have surrendered to the seasons of God's will and the seasons of God's heart! Because what we wait for dramatically conditions the quality of our waiting; what we are expecting changes the manner in which we wait.***

We are waiting, above all, for Christ to come among us, waiting for the angel to present God's plans to us, always waiting for the Holy Spirit to enliven us anew.

We are waiting for God to take the initiative, to be revealed in our life again more profoundly, more deeply; to reveal his divine face to us once more.

If this is our waiting, and we orient ourselves to it, then *how* we wait, and the *manner* in which we wait will change.

With such an orientation, all of our day-to-day anxieties and irritations take lower and lower precedence. We will be less desperate, less anxious and less impatient.



We take a great deal of time in Advent to decorate our trees, and our homes, because we want them to reflect the beauty and the joy of the Christmas season.

God asks us in this season of decoration to be decorous about the way we wait—to have a sense of dignity about ourselves. God asks us to dress ourselves this season with a great patience, and great anticipation that *he* is coming, that Christ is being born among us, that *his* Holy Spirit is coming down upon us.

What are we really waiting for? The quality of our waiting is altered by what we hope to find at the end of Advent, and the end of our life.

What we wait for, what we hope to find is the Christ Child and a revelation of the fresh face of God—as fresh and exciting and compelling as the face of an infant.

We all know the energy that a baby generates. We have been blessed here at East Union with many baptisms. Today again, with Abby. There is a hope, a desire, a profound human aspiration in the face of every baby, every child.

Christmas reveals the face of God in the face of a baby, and in this season, there is a great “O” on the lips of all Christians throughout the world.

Our deepest longings are not to get through the department store line more quickly; not to get out of the traffic jam efficiently, these are misplaced enthusiasms, not even to pay off the house, get that next great job, or have our children graduate from college, even these are secondary.

Advent helps us turn our hearts to the primary interest, and to give the secondary things our secondary interest. We are reminded to give our “O” to God and to Christ, his Son.



### ***O Come, O Come, Emmanuel...***

The Word became flesh; the ideal of God's love became real in our midst; the dream that God had for us came true in our company.

The hopes that all the nations had envisioned now became a joy in the midst of Israel; the fears that people had stored up inside themselves were dispelled for a moment one night in Bethlehem.

The song says it very well: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

All of those things which make waiting difficult: exaggerated hopes and exaggerated fears are met in this season by the coming of Christ.

We are all an Advent people. Advent is not a mystery of which we have only an idea; it is not just something we read about in the Gospel. We live the reality of Advent all the time because we are always waiting for that fulfillment which only God can give.

One of the things we come to realize in this season is that no mortal being will be able to satisfy the longing, the hopes, and the desires of our hearts. No human being, no event, no thing will be able to fulfill us, unless God himself is with us.

The most ordinary kind of idolatry in the modern church is that, inadvertently, we expect a particular person here or there, a particular family here or there, a particular relationship, a particular community, a particular job, a particular income, or a particular house to fulfill us.

The "O" of our heart belongs to Christ: "O come, O come, Emmanuel—

NOT O come, O come, promotion and raise

NOT O come, O come, my children back to visit me more often;

NOT O come, O come, good health and a long vacation.

NOT O come, O come, winning lottery ticket

All of these things might be good things, but they are secondary things. We dare not get caught in the snare of impatience.

Only God can satisfy the longing of our hearts. We are called to a great patience because we are waiting for the Word to become flesh; we are waiting for God to show his love to us; we are waiting *most* for this and *first* for this. God gives himself to us and we figure out how to give ourselves to God.

**What a marvelous exchange!**

**“O come, O come, Emmanuel.”**

*[My “Waiting for Dawn” Advent Sermon Series is inspired by “Waiting for Dawn: Portents of His Coming,” Scriptural reflections on Advent by Father Mark Gruber, a Benedictine monk of Saint Vincent Abbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. While I have adapted his words, many of the ideas and turns of phrase are his.]*