

Advent is the season of waiting, our tradition tells us, but not the kind of waiting that happens in the Doctor's office. Don't grab a magazine, don't pull out your phone, this is *Advent* waiting. It is like children waiting for Christmas morning, with anticipation and hope and imaginations for what isn't yet but will be. It's like an expectant mother waiting on a birth, something which she has no control over at all. It's like waiting for the medicine to take effect, it's here, but not yet here, hoped for, and anticipated. It IS coming, it's almost here, and we sit somewhere between the already and the not yet.

In Advent we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ into the world - knowing all too well that Christ has already come (born in that manger in Bethlehem millenia ago), but also that we wait on Christ to be born into the world again, every Advent season and, indeed, we wait and hope for Christ to be born into the world in every season and every day.

Are we fools for waiting? Because, if we're honest, peace doesn't feel "almost here," nor does hope, most of the time. No, the things we truly are waiting for - peace, hope, justice, an end to hunger and violence - maybe they are still a long way off, and we have a long time still left to wait. Well then, is our waiting foolish? Have you ever waited at a bus stop for such a long time that you wonder if that bus is even running anymore. And you know the people walking by are shaking their heads, laughing at you - the fool - waiting for the bus that isn't coming anytime soon. Maybe that's what our Advent waiting is like - foolish waiting that says - you can't hear it coming, and you're a little worried your map is out of date, but maybe, if you squint your eyes just enough, you can see the glint of a headlight on a far distant horizon.

There was nothing remarkable about Mildred Lisette Norman (1908-1981) at first. She grew up on a poultry farm in Egg Harbor City, New Jersey in the early 20th century. You'd never guess that, at age 45, she'd give away all her possessions, don a tunic emblazoned Peace Pilgrim,

and walk the U.S. for 28 years preaching nonviolence. "During the early years of my life, I discovered that money-making was easy but not satisfying," Peace Pilgrim once explained. And one night in the late 1930s, "out of a feeling of deep seeking for a meaningful way of life," she began walking through the woods. "And after I had walked almost all night, I came out into a clearing where the moonlight was shining down. And something just motivated me to speak and I found myself saying, 'If you can use me for anything, please use me. Here I am, take all of me, use me as you will, I withhold nothing,' " Peace Pilgrim recalled. "That night, I experienced the complete willingness, without any reservations whatsoever, to give my life to something beyond myself." She set off on her pilgrimage at age 45 on New Years Day 1953, leaving from the Rose Parade in Pasadena, and Peace Pilgrim, kept walking her talk—for the next 28 years. Her vow: " 'I shall remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace, walking until I am given shelter and fasting until I am given food.' " Peace Pilgrim acknowledged that some may have considered her "kooky." But, she once said, "pioneers have always been looked upon as being a bit strange."

No, waiting does not have to be passive. The time of waiting is also the time of preparing our hearts. This was the message John the Baptist was bringing to the world. John the Baptist was what we'd call a Holy Fool. He lived in the wilderness around the Dead Sea, subsisting on a starvation diet and wearing clothes that even Good Will wouldn't have handled. When he preached, it was fire and brimstone every time. The Kingdom was coming all right, he said, but if you thought it was going to be streets flowing with milk and honey, you'd better think again. If you didn't shape up, God would give you the ax like an elm with the blight or toss you into the incinerator like chaff. Your only hope, he said, was to clean up your life as if your life depended on it, which it did, and get baptized in a hurry as a sign that you had.

It's Jesus who helps John the Baptist see that he's living in the already and the not yet. When John sends a message to Jesus asking - you are the one we've been waiting for, right? Jesus sends word back saying: "You go tell John what you've seen around here. Tell him there are people who have sold their seeing-eye dogs and taken up bird-watching. Tell him there are people who've traded in aluminum walkers for hiking boots. Tell him the down-and-out have turned into the up-and-coming and a lot of deadbeats are living it up for the first time in their lives."

For John the Baptist - and for the disciples - Jesus is the one they've been waiting for. And they've been waiting like fools, for generations, waiting upon the coming Messiah, the one who would come into this world and set everything right. Weeping and sighing will be no more. The predators who bared their teeth of military might and economic oppression for so long, will lie down in peace. They will not hurt or destroy on all that holy mountain. And they needed that Messiah to show up asap. Lives were on the line. As they had been for generations. This community, Jesus's community - living under the boot of the Roman Empire - took comfort in the messages of earlier prophets. Isaiah - a prophet, a fool for God, spoke this word of hope to a people struggling to pick up the pieces after the exile...

According to these prophets, the one they were waiting for would come from a special lineage - descended - like King David before him, from the House of Jesse. But the image Isaiah uses here is that the house of Jesse has been cut off, - and yet, as foolish as it is to believe, as preposterous and impossible as it may sound - a sprout would grow out of that cut off stump and make the future possible.

This is why the Gospel of Matthew begins - not with an angelic visitation or a star in the sky - but with a genealogy - a rather dry and dusty list outlining Jesus' family tree. Now, any cursory examination of this long list of names reveals something pretty quickly - Jesus is being traced through his father, until his father's line doesn't match up, and

Matthew switches, not once, not twice, but three times from the patrilineal line to the matrilineal, and then back again. Matthew's genealogy is a pretzel, twisting and turning over on itself. And you might be asking – so what? I mean what does that really matter? One way to look at it is that Matthew was very interested in his readers seeing the story of Jesus, the figure of Jesus, as rooted in tradition.

But another way to see it is that Matthew wanted to impart something more subversive – so he made the genealogy switch not only to women, but even to foreign women – like Ruth – including everyone in Jesus' story, as if the gospel cannot be told through patriarchal structures, nor through the lens of xenophobia. And these women - each in their own way an outcast, these women— despite the loathsome, corrupt systems they were in—found a way to claim their voice and found enough power to survive and to pass on the lineage, all the way to Jesus.

Truly - this idea that a shoot would come from the stump of Jesse - that a lineage would survive through famine and warfare, was foolishness.

For John the Baptist - and for the disciples - Jesus is the one they've been waiting for. And they've been waiting like fools, for generations, waiting upon the coming Messiah, the one who would come into this world and set everything right. God, born into the world walking and talking and healing and loving in the world. They were fools while they were waiting, believing that God would deliver on God's promises, and now that Jesus is here they're even bigger fools. Some give up their homes and livelihoods to follow Jesus, working to build a community to share the Good News of the Gospel with a world not ready to hear it - what fools. And even more - these disciples come to believe in life after death, resurrection after the cross - what foolishness.

The line between bravery and foolishness is razor thin.

It's Foolishness to think that a root could come from the stump of Jesse, foolishness to wait on the promised one to deliver the world from injustice and sin. It's foolish to believe in the possibility of peace, to hope in the resurrection and life and love beyond death. It is just the kind of foolishness we need. It is just the kind of faith we need.

For we find ourselves in the place between already and not yet, which - put another way, means we are right in the middle of the story. This place of waiting gives us the opportunity to cry out, "God, I believe that you are coming" and "God, thank you for being by my side" all in the same breath. I want faith like that now, foolish as it may seem.

While we wait we prepare the way. Our peace lies in something we cannot yet touch or see or hold or possess. And, frankly, it lies in us trusting something that will seem foolish, at least at first. For the world does not teach us about peace, it teaches us to win. It teaches us to conquer. It teaches us that the golden rule is, "He who has the gold makes the rules." But in here, the Golden Rule is, "Love God with all your heart, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself." But our Peace is also found in the already. Peace, Jesus will teach us, is found by doing the things that make for it. Peace comes to us in pieces, and only with our participation. For we are all authors in the story of Peace, told and retold whenever we prepare room for Christ in our hearts.