

A TIME OF PROMISE

December 9

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Although I've been a Christian all my life, I never really "got" Advent. While I've always loved Christmas (I mean, who doesn't – it's basically a birthday party for Jesus, but we get the presents!), it had become a time of running around for me: running from mall to mall (at the last minute), trying to find that perfect present; running from dinner party to family gathering to school play to church to... ugh. And don't get me started about the Christmas tunes on infinite repeat on the radio! Advent was just a long, painful lead-up to Christmas, and became a time to endure, rather than to celebrate.

Then one year, we started going to Advent Retreat at Gull Lake. Held annually on the first weekend of Advent, this retreat is a time to rest, reflect, and pray, with family and close friends. There is usually a guest speaker, incredible music, and delicious food. There are late-night board games, Christmas crafts, afternoon naps, sleigh rides, Christmas carols, bonfires, and skating on the lake. But the best part, for me, was that it was a time to let go of the fray – a time to put my heart in the right space heading into the season.

At the 2017 Advent Retreat, the guest speaker used art, music and poetry to explore the meaning of Advent (following Steve Bell's "Pilgrim Year – Advent" book). We were given time to write our own poetry about Advent, too. This didn't sit well with me – I'm an accountant, after all. But I wrote the following haiku in my notebook:

Uncomfortable
In the dark, in the silence
You are worth the wait

Looking back, I'm not sure this is my own creation. Maybe I stole it from someone (probably Nicole). Regardless, I love that last line – you are worth the wait. This is what is central to Advent: waiting for the promise found in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Please read Galatians 3:23-4:7

God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis – that he would bless Abraham and his seed. Paul explains earlier in Galatians that it was no mistake that God used the singular version of the word "seed". God's seed is Jesus. So, in order to receive the promise of God's blessing – our "Inheritance" - we must turn to Jesus.

While the Jewish people waited for the coming of the Messiah, God gave them the Law, through Moses. Paul describes the Law as a "custodian" or "schoolmaster" for the people of God until Jesus came. The Law is good, of course – it came from God. But while the schoolmaster was good at educating the people about their sinful nature, and provided direction and restraint, that's all it could do – it could not give the Jewish people their inheritance.

It is only through faith in Jesus, not through works under the Law, that we are children of God. And once we are children of God, we can receive our inheritance!

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending us your son, that we all may receive the inheritance you promised – your rich blessing on us. Help us grow deeper in our faith. You are worth the wait. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

PS – I found another poem in my notebook from the 2017 Advent Retreat. This limerick is definitely a Danny Dodds original:

There once was a man named Jesus
Who came to save each one of us
He died on a cross
But he showed who's the boss
To him all will bend the knee-sus.