



Café (boldcafe.org) is a monthly on-line magazine for and with young adult women made possible from support from women’s groups active in Women of the ELCA (welca.org), the women’s organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

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Waiting


by Elyssa J. Salinas-Lazarski

“The Hungry Caterpillar” is one of my 2-year-old’s favorite books. Throughout 12 pages, the caterpillar spends a week eating, growing, and learning before transforming into a beautiful butterfly. I read this with my daughter as we stay inside, awaiting our transformation from pandemic isolation back to a world with hugs, close contact, family functions, and a lot less anxiety.

I feel like I’ve been in a cocoon with my family for months, and while there is a great deal of comfort and privilege in this tight space, it is a place of transition.

We are in Advent, a time of waiting, of watchfulness, of transition. As we await the celebration of the birth of Jesus, our anticipation includes wreaths, candles, solemnity, and even silence. Yet, I find that my most memorable times of waiting and transition were anything but solemn and calm.

I remember waiting, irritable and stressed, for acceptance or rejection letters into doctoral programs (I received both kinds). I kept refreshing my inbox as if a new email would come in the eight seconds since I last checked. My hands would shake when I would see a school name. And when I got accepted, I screamed. This waiting was tense and heightened, leaving me with a memory of drinking too much coffee.



I remember waiting for the pregnancy test results I took while home alone with my 11-month-old daughter. I hadn't felt nauseated. But I did feel faint a couple of times if I waited too long to eat, so I decided to take a test as a precaution. I didn't plan to be pregnant, as I did with my first.

I paced the kitchen as I listened to my daughter babble in her highchair. My bones felt as if they would jump out of my skin if I tried to sit down. When I checked the test, it registered positive. I cried and promptly tried the other two tests in the box after glugging a bottle of water. My waiting was filled with anxiety and anticipation. And I got the same results.

Waiting to be born

When my son was born, I wore a mask and anxiously waited with my husband in a surgery prep room. My blood pressure was elevated, so doctors moved up my C-section. When I went into the operating room, they gave me an anesthetic to numb me from my belly down to my toes. The plan was for me to be awake during the surgery and birth of my son.

The pain of that anesthetic made me weep uncontrollably. I cried out into the tiled room, sweating. This pain was part of the waiting, the lying on the operating table awake was part of the waiting, and the waiting finally ended when I heard my son's first cry.

Waiting on the world to change

When I waited for election results this year, I woke up worried. By the end of breakfast, I was sobbing. I was on the verge of a panic attack, becoming a more regular occurrence during the pandemic. My husband and I decided to escape with the kids to show them Lake Michigan for the first time and have a picnic. Our outing checked all of the 2020s boxes:

- socially distant, check
- activity to keep the kids busy (and contained), check
- doing anything to take my mind off my fears, check.

We packed up our food and our kids, with more than one voice-raising moment at my 2-year-old. Once in the car, my 6-month-old started screaming.

While we were waiting for the election results to come in over the next couple of days, we were also waiting for test results to see if we had COVID. We all had swabs jammed up our noses in an empty MINI Cooper dealership. We stood in line and waited, we got back in our car and waited, we went home and waited, we went to bed and waited.

The entire time my anxiety spiked whenever I felt a tickle in my throat, or one of us sneezed. I felt guilty for passing people on our outing at the lake, even though all parties were masked and distancing. I kept bursting into tears or yelling at our cats for little things that would set me off. I needed noise to fill all silences, or else I would be alone with my thoughts.

I was waiting, and I was terrified.

When the election was called, that waiting ended. We received a text message with our COVID results, and all of us tested negative. We hugged. We cried. We called our close family and friends who had been waiting with us.

This year has given us all pause: Waiting for election results, a vaccine, a safe way to be together—and now for the story of Christ.

I can't imagine the night of Christ's birth was silent. It involved the pain of contractions and the cries of a young Mary. Birth is transformational. It turns a person into a parent and a body into a cocoon. What emerges is more than a child; it is hope.

Waiting is painful and scary and hopeful and beautiful. There is deep pain when waiting for something truly transformational. When we are transformed, it is from something that changes our world and shakes us to the core. And sometimes, that change takes time.

Discussion questions:

1. What does waiting mean for you in the time of Advent?
2. How does waiting affect you?
3. What does transformation mean to you? -
4. How can you cultivate hope in a time of extended uncertainty?



Closing Prayer:

God of transformation, stay with us in our waiting, our watchfulness, and our hope. We wait for your coming in this time of Advent. We pray that the waiting makes us more compassionate to the world around us. Fill our watchful hearts with peace and our actions with kindness. In your name we pray, amen.

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Faith Reflections: Laughter and tears

by Elyssa J. Salinas-Lazarski

I'm a planner. I like to look at my month, my week, my day in color-coded control. I have stickers to help me see my to-do lists and multiple pens to keep my thoughts organized. I even have more than one planner to help me keep everything in an orderly fashion. But one of my favorite parts of both my planners is the ability to reflect.

Each month my planner has a list of questions prompting me to consider the previous month: events that stood out, ways I spent my time, people who showed up in profound ways. I've been thinking about this notion of reflection at the end of one of the most memorable years of my life, 2020.

I don't think I'm alone in considering this year as memorable because so much has happened while I've been working from home with my family.

It feels unimaginable that this year could ever come to an end, and yet here we are... December, finally. Sometimes I feel like I'm holding my breath for the year to come to an end. So much has been lost.


I think back to March and April when it just felt like we were losing the ability to hold one another. I was scared, unsure, and frustrated at the inability to find hand soap.

I was mostly terrified because I was in my third trimester, and I knew that my baby would be born during a pandemic. I was worried that I might have to be alone at the hospital or that I would catch Covid-19 and hurt my baby.

On April 14, my second child was born via c-section. My husband was the first one to hold him, and we went home safely.

On November 14, another surgery was happening. This time an old friend needed a routine surgery after a simple misstep on a stair. After some complications, this young woman did not wake up. She did not go home to her husband for just over a year. She will not get to see the heavy exhale of the end of 2020. She was one of the dear ones lost to it.

When I heard, I held my son, and my exhale was a rupture of tears and wailing. The friend who called to tell me sounded like she was gasping for air. We both were.



After hearing the news, I searched my Bible for something. I'm not sure if I was looking for comfort or an answer, but I went to the psalm that always sits in my heart. It begins, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?" This sentiment felt right, but by the end of this short psalm, the speaker says, "my heart shall rejoice in your salvation." I was not ready for rejoicing, and honestly, I'm still not. Why was this psalmist so quick to trust and rejoice? I needed more time and more mourning.

I found John 11:35. "Jesus began to weep." This resonated with me, but then I kept weeping, and Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. I kept searching.

Finally, I found Luke 6:21. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." At first, I stepped away from this passage, but then I thought back to how I remembered her. I was on a video call with a mutual friend, the one who called to let me know, and we lamented how we couldn't hold each other, so we would at least see each other.

We wept and sat in disbelief across our screens. But then we started remembering little things about our friend that made us smile and, eventually, made us laugh. We never stopped crying, and the laughing came and went, but this wavering between the two felt right.

This beatitude promise from Luke leaves space for weeping and for laughing. It lets the mourner waver in between because there is nowhere to indeed land. We are suspended, wading through various emotions while also trying to find a reason why. We wipe our tears, hoping at the end of this tissue box there will be some answer, but there is none. There are only a pile of crumpled tissues and an empty box.

There is almost an emptiness in searching for a reason, but sometimes it is all we can do because the alternative of accepting a stupid and tragic ending is too painful. It is all too painful.

So we wait.

Sometimes we wait for an answer that we might never get. Sometimes we wait for a why when no reason will ever be enough. We wait for an answer. We wait for a reason.

We are ending the year without thousands of our friends, family, and neighbors. We are waiting for a reason where there is none.

We are in deep mourning for a world and a people we once knew, but we are moving toward a new day without these souls and faces that we can only cling to in pictures and ghosts of messages that echo on our Facebook pages.

Advent talks about waiting and hope. But there is also a deep lament alongside deep that joy.

I gave birth to my son this year, and I lost a dear friend. Both happened, and both deserve to be remembered. There is laughter among the weeping, sometimes in the same breath. I was holding my son when I heard the news about my friend. That is not an answer, but it is the truth.

I do not know if we will ever know the answers. But I do know that we have a God who waits with us, weeps with us, and holds us in the terrible unknowing. We have a God holding us as we cry painful tears and joins us in remembering laughter. We have a God that stays with us as we wait.

Discussion questions:

1. How are you different at the end of this year?
2. What does it mean to have a God who waits with us?
3. What does it mean for you to hold the tension between laughter and tears?

Closing prayer:

God of patience and waiting, hold onto our tears alongside our laughter. At the end of such a year, hold space for our mourning and our joy. Be with us as we venture forth with new lessons and without loved ones. Let us look to one another, through screens and with masks as we mark the end of the year and the birth of the Messiah. In your name we pray, amen.

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