

## **Advent 2: Luke 3:1-6**

### **Title: Waiting in the wilderness – a time of preparation**

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#### **Objectives:**

To invite us to consider active waiting, a time of preparation

- Preparing ourselves to see differently
- Preparing ourselves to give up control
- Preparing ourselves to forgive

Reflective Question: “What are you called to prepare for as you wait?”

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Ever send a message and then become restless as you wait for the reply?

Ever text someone and then can't put down your phone because you are so anxious for their response?

I am not good at waiting.

Perhaps, like me, you get ready for a party or event at least an hour before and then pace around not knowing what to do with yourself while you wait?

Did I say, I am not good at waiting?

And yet early 20th century Jewish mystic, Simone Weil, says: “Waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life.”

Wandering in the wilderness, waiting, is part of our heritage as followers of this way. It's in our DNA.

The Israelite nation were rescued out of Egypt only to wander for who knows how many years (a whole generation and some) before finally ‘arriving’.

And that only lasted a few kingdoms and they were back traipsing through the wilderness exiled into Babylon.

It seems that we are part of a faith tradition that wanders in wildernesses and waits.

“But that's just Old Testament language” you might argue.

Well actually – no – that is precisely where we pick up today's text.

John the Baptist is in the Wilderness, when the Word of God came to him.

Luke, traditionally known as the author of this Gospel, was a master at using the technique of ‘synchronicity’ – writing about the simultaneous occurrence of events that appear significantly related but have no discernible causal connection. A word only later coined by psycho-analyst, Carl Jung.

Luke begins this section of the gospel, with names of powerful people holding political and religious office, influencers. And into the mix he throws in John – the son of a Priest, Zachariah. None of these people are connected... yet. *(Commentary on Luke, Craddock)*

But this paranormal reality known as ‘synchronicity’ defies logic and because God’s Word comes to John, soon the Synagogue rulers, high priests, city officials, leading women, ship captains, imperial guards, governors and kings, and the emperor himself will all hear this prophet’s cry and the Good News of forgiveness will reach them in the years ahead.

You see the author of Luke, also wrote the book of Acts. And John’s ‘cries in the wilderness’, my friends, is just the beginning.

I wonder just how long John waited in the Wilderness, before just that right mix of timing, resources, people, words, and anticipation came together?

And then there is some visible action: he goes, he announces good news, he baptizes, and he is given the words to cry out. Words we will look at in detail next week.

But today, let’s pause a moment at the scene of waiting in the wilderness, and of John’s and our preparation.

Waiting is actually worth it. But it’s hard work. Waiting is also an action for in this time, we are preparing.

I am grateful for the writing of Catholic spirituality teacher and author Henri Nouwen on waiting. Because, like Henri, many of us are action oriented. And waiting feels counterproductive. Nouwen leads us into a reflection on waiting that is active.

*(The Spirituality of Waiting, audio recording by Henri Nouwen)*

When I am anxious because I am struggling to wait – I remember these words:

**Waiting is preparation.**

**In my waiting, I prepare myself...**

**(1) To see each moment as full, and not empty. I train my senses, my mind, my body.**

People who wait trust that each moment has been created full of possibility. Pregnant with potential. Waiting is a movement. It is an expectant movement from something to something more. Even though we may not know yet what it is.

Waiting is active. Most of us think of waiting as something very passive, a hopeless state determined by events totally out of our hands. The bus is late. You cannot do anything about it, so you have to sit there and just wait. It is not difficult to understand the irritation people feel when somebody says, “Just wait.”

But there is none of this passivity in Scripture. Those who are waiting are waiting very actively. They know that what they are waiting for is growing from the ground on which they are standing. That’s the secret. The secret of waiting is the faith that the seed has been planted, that something has begun. Active waiting means to be present fully to the moment, in the conviction that something is happening. A waiting person is a patient person.

The word “patience” means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us. Impatient people are

always expecting the real thing to happen somewhere else and therefore want to go elsewhere. The moment is empty. But patient people dare to stay where they are. Patient living means to live actively in the present and wait there.

*(The Spirituality of Waiting, audio recording by Henri Nouwen)*

**In my waiting I prepare myself...**

**(1) To see each moment as full, and not empty. I train my senses, my mind, my body.**

**And in my waiting I prepare myself...**

**(2) By giving up control.**

Waiting is open-ended. Open-ended waiting is hard for us because we tend to wait for something very concrete, for something that we wish to have. Much of our waiting is filled with wishes: “I wish that the weather would be better. I wish that the pain would go.” For this reason, a lot of our waiting is not open-ended. Instead, our waiting is a way of controlling the future. We want the future to go in a very specific direction, and if this does not happen we are disappointed and can even slip into despair.

To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our own imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to God’s love and not according to our fear. The spiritual life is a life in which we wait actively present to the moment, trusting that new things will happen to us, new things that are far beyond our own imagination, fantasy, or prediction. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.

*(The Spirituality of Waiting, audio recording by Henri Nouwen)*

**Seeing each moment as full**

**And giving up control.**

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While John the Baptist is in the wilderness, waiting, preparing himself – the Word of God came to him. It sounds so easy...

But the author quotes a passage from Isaiah chapter 40 vs 3-5:

A voice cries out:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,

Verse 6 of this Isaiah passage, Luke leaves out. The verse goes like this:

<sup>6</sup> A voice says, “Cry out!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

Prophets, poets, preachers all have this burning to write, to speak.

But our words never come easily. We wait for the Muse, that Spirit that creates, sparks, speaks words. A process author Steven Pressfield calls the “War of Art”.

Waiting for words is excruciating.

Poet, Scott Cairns writes that “What shall I cry?” is his unceasing prayer. Compelled to give witness, he aches to find the right words.

We wait. We ache. And we actively prepare for what is to come.

**For waiting is preparation.**

**(1) To see each moment as full.**

**(2) And is a giving up control.**

Because as we live in the moment and surrender our control...

The Spirit makes us painfully aware of the parts of ourselves and the people in our lives that need our love and our forgiveness.

For how are we to be a voice for Good in our world, how are we to speak of turning toward the Light, of forgiveness, if our own hearts are unprepared.

While we wait, it may seem like nothing is happening.  
We might feel like Mary Oliver who wrote:

I sat on the bench, waiting for something.  
An angel, perhaps.  
Or dancers with the legs of goats.  
No, I didn't see either. But only, I think, because  
I didn't stay long enough.

*Mary Oliver*

Because when we wait – in trust and surrender, actually everything is happening.  
Our internal valleys of bitterness, or anger or un-forgiveness or of self-loathing; and  
Our internal mountains of ego and self-aggrandizement.  
Are being leveled out.

And just when that right mix of timing, resources, people, words, and anticipation come together.  
The fruit of are waiting will be the way of Christ.

**Amen.**

Reflective Question: What are you called to prepare for as you wait?”