

Advent 3 (B) – December 4, 2011
Saint Stephen's Church, Wimberley, TX
Patrick Gahan
John 1:6-8, 19-28
We Can Be Changed...through Preparation!

We can't wait for Christmas. In fact, we don't. This year we didn't even wait for the first day of Christmas shopping – the infamous *Black Friday* – because we insisted it begin on Thanksgiving night. People pushed away from the dinner table – “Thanks for dinner, Grandma” – and headed right out the door to get in line at *Target* and *Best Buy*. 'Tis the season when we want everything to come fast and early.

Well... almost everything. Let's say you're expecting a baby. That's one thing on your list for which you'd rather wait. Barbara Brown Taylor, esteemed professor, author, and preacher confidently declares: “Ask any expectant mother if she wants her baby to come early and she will say no, she does not. As badly as her back hurts, and long as it has been since she has seen her toes, she is willing to wait because the baby is not ready yet. The eyelashes are ready, but not the fingernails. The kidneys are ready, but not the lungs. Those wing shaped sacks are still preparing to make the leap from fluid to air. There is still more time to do in the dusky womb, where the baby is growing like a seed in the dark.

The child's parents may never be ready, especially if this is their first. They want this; they are terrified of this; they cannot imagine how this happened. Meanwhile, they have a few baby-less weeks to go, which they can put to good use. They can make sure the nursery is ready. They can learn to sing some lullabies. They can think about what it means to bring a human being into the world, and what it will take to raise this child into his or her full humanity. All they cannot do is hold the baby in the light, because the baby is still in the dark.”¹

John-the-Baptist says it is good for us to wait in the dark for awhile and prepare for the light. John knows his part in the BIG STORY and hastily admits that “he is not the light but came to testify that the light was on the way” (**John 1:8**). This “light is the spark of all creation, it is the light that infuses all people, and it is a blaze that cannot and will not ever be eclipsed,” The light, John soon discovers, is Jesus (**John 1:1-5**). But Jesus, the light, doesn't stream uninvited into our hearts, says John; we have to prepare for him.

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, “Redeeming Darkness”, Christian Century, November 29, 2011, 37.

John roars this fact at the religious authorities who show up at the River Jordan to interrogate him? John reminds the religious stuffed-shirts what God told the captured Israelites in Babylon over 500 years ago through the prophet Isaiah: “I’m the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the highway of the Lord’” (JN 1:23 & IS 40:3). God was on the verge of bringing them out of their imprisonment and bringing them back home to Jerusalem – giving rebirth to the dream of Israel, a dream most thought dead. So, rails John, don’t be surprised that God is up to the same thing again. For those who wait and prepare, God is building a new super highway into their hearts so that God’s dream for each one of us will be reborn.

How do we prepare an off-ramp, a parking place for Christ to take up in us? Well, waiting in just the way we are now. Let me explain: Two Sundays ago, I told you that it is essential to bookend our days with morning and evening prayer. Through this simple exercise, we plow open the furrows of each day we are given to await what new thing God will do with us. In that way, we live in daily expectation. Then, like John, we begin to realize that each day we have unfolds as part of God’s BIG STORY.

That may be so, you say, “but how do we see our part in the BIG STORY?” The main way is through corporate worship – Holy Communion with God and each other. The story that is rehearsed Sunday after Sunday is not only Jesus’ story; it is ours. That’s why we call it the BIG STORY. You know the well-worn lines: Jesus “on the night he was betrayed” broke bread and took a cup of wine – but then he served it to his friends. Jesus is arrested, tortured, and marched through the streets of Jerusalem – but he takes every step for us. Ultimately, Jesus is horribly crucified on a cross between two notorious criminals – but Jesus does that for each one of us, his friends whom he loves. You see, this BIG STORY tells us who we are: Beloved of God.

This truth struck me unexpectedly last Tuesday. I was sitting across the lunch table from a senior retired priest whom I do not know well. He leaned over on his right elbow and said, “If I don’t go to Holy Eucharist, I forget who I am. I become an amnesiac who does not remember that I am the object of Christ’s love. I am loved by the Light, the Light that gave birth to the universe is constantly reborn in me that way.

Like that seasoned preacher, we come together to listen, to pray, to prepare, to make a place for the light to be reborn within our hearts. Sometimes it gets a little dark in here [*preacher taps on his chest*], and yet we know it is worth the wait.