

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.”

1 Corinthians 13:11

Anticipation

“Wait with anticipation” is the age-old theme of Advent. As a child I remember waiting with anticipation for Christmas morning when my brother, sister, and I would fly downstairs to piles of bright gifts beneath a spruce covered in glitter and glass ornaments. Sunday School had taught me there was a connection between God’s gift of love in the birth of Jesus and our giving gifts to one another. But in a youngster’s imagination, that meaning became murky — there was always a disconnect between the message of a baby born in a stinky manger (surely it stank as any livestock owner knows) and the glitter of toys.



KAREN
CAMPBELL-NELSON

Paul admonishes us to put aside our childish ways — not to speak or think or reason like a child. And yet, this Advent, I long for the innocence of young children, not old or “mature” enough to understand the differences of intolerance. I long to relive a joy that envelops me in wild playfulness and laughter. I long for that child’s anticipation of going outside to play. O God, where is that spirit?

We are torn. We long to wait in anticipation for the Prince of Peace to change the world in all the different ways transformation happens — one heart at a time; through social movements that shout “stop!” to wanton natural resource extraction, condemn violence towards women and children, assert that black lives matter, or occupy Wall Street; through the grace of miraculous forgiveness. Yet the anticipation that surrounds us remains full of static, ready to burst into violence. Party or parties unknown, with different political and economic agendas, seem to be stirring the pot of human vulnerability and emotion to bring to the surface fears about difference. Different ethnic and religious identities are felt as threats to security rather than the great diversity of human community that God imagined. Our anticipation of dread butts heads with anticipation of hope for change.

But wait, pause, remember.

Advent, I begin to realize anew, is not merely waiting in anticipation, it is anticipating the best of who we were created to be and ushering in that anticipation together, with others, trusting that love indeed can conquer all.

Karen Campbell-Nelson serves the Evangelical Christian Church of West Timor as a professor in the Faculty of Theology of Artha Wacana Christian University in Indonesia. Her appointment is supported by your gifts to One Great Hour of Sharing, Our Churches Wider Mission, Disciples Mission Fund and your special gifts.



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