



ADVENT: A TIME TO WAIT

BY JAY MAST

VOL. 52 | NO. 12
A CMC PUBLICATION

Wait! I have a particular aversion to the word “wait.” It must be because of my inherently low levels of patience necessary to gracefully navigate times of waiting. This year I have been constantly reminded of my annoyance at waiting and my seeming inability to be patient. The year began with my astutely observant mentor suggesting that patience might be a quality in which I should seek to grow. I recognized he was serious and apparently colluding with God when I ruptured my Achilles tendon a week later. So, for ten months I have been waiting and preparing to regain the full use of my leg and to acquire that elusive patience. Ever eager to be helpful, my three-year-old son has seemingly determined to also assist me in these pursuits. He takes such joy and delight in helping me develop patience. I am amazed and rather impressed at his ability to respond to my summons by taking the most circuitous routes imaginable: down the stairs, over the couch, under the high chair, around the table — all while being able to insist that he is indeed responding to my call. How delightful a journey for him and how frustrating for this patience-lacking parent!

Advent sounded rather liturgical, high-churchy, outdated, a relic from the past.

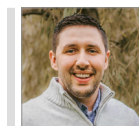
Like a callous that builds up over time, with repeated use and the rupture of a few blisters, so has patience been slowly growing in me. I am by no means in danger of being mistaken as the epitome of patience, but I have had opportunities to grow and reflect on the value of being patient amidst the wait. If I’m honest, my most treasured experiences and possessions have come through a purposeful time of delayed gratification. The most significant growth has come in the liminal space between desire and fulfillment. Generally, the wait has been more valuable than the reward. Which is possibly why I’ve come to greatly enjoy and appreciate the season of Advent.

Advent is a season of waiting. I waited for Advent most of my life and only became aware of its existence several years ago. And at first, I was rather skeptical. Advent sounded rather liturgical,

high-churchy, outdated, a relic from the past (a far cry from the persona I aspired to). But I was intrigued by the idea that I could gainfully redeem the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas with more than Black Friday shopping and family feasts. And so, I cautiously began my foray into this wonderful time. And it has been gripping my imagination ever since: a single Advent service on Christmas has turned into an Advent sermon series, an Advent devotional in our home, a greater enjoyment of the Christmas season, and of course — the wreath and candles.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, it is so easy to get caught up in the -isms: commercialism, materialism, emotionalism, etc. Advent tends to change our focus as we wait on Christ’s birth with anticipation. Advent is a liminal space! A time of waiting, a time of preparing, and a time of expectation! Advent has a way of refocusing our hearts and reforming our desires toward Jesus. We focus on the hope, faith, joy, and peace found in the mystery of the incarnation and we long for the Second Coming of our Savior. And after all this time of waiting and preparation, when Christmas finally arrives, we find that the -isms have lost their grip. We are eager to focus our celebration on the one whom we’ve been waiting on for weeks — Jesus! Waiting, preparing, and developing patience have surprisingly led us to experiencing the goodness of God!

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)*



Jay serves as senior pastor of Hicksville Mennonite Church. He and his wife, Renita, have a 3-year-old son. Jay enjoys extended walks with his family, disc golf, traveling, and finding cool tidbits of information on virtually everything.



Consider It Pure Joy

BY BRIAN HERSHBERGER

As I reflect on the themes of Advent, one stands out to me. Joy. Not because I feel incredibly happy right now. Rather, quite the opposite. This has been a year of loss in our lives. People dying much too young. Just last evening I sat with a young lady who is in the last stages of her battle with cancer. Her family was around her, including her husband and three young children. I couldn't have been further from a scene of happiness. God must have had something other than happiness in mind when he inspired James to write, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds..." (James 1:2 NIV).

Last year I wrote my December article on the subject of peace, and how the peace of God transcends human understanding. It strikes me that similarly to peace, the joy that is ours in Christ Jesus transcends human understanding. The world's version of joy is simply another word for happiness; the absence of trouble or hardship, and the presence of good fortune. The joy that is ours in Christ Jesus isn't circumstance dependent – it is a gift from God. In fact, true joy often distinguishes itself in the midst of adverse situations.

We are told in Scripture that Jesus, "...for the joy set before him endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2). Hardly what we would call a happy situation, yet there was the presence of joy.

True joy often distinguishes itself in the midst of adverse situations.

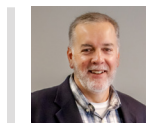
Similarly, Peter wrote, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

It was certainly true of the first Christmas. "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger'" (Luke 2:10-12).

Consider for a moment the situation. Mary was pregnant and unwed in Nazareth. True, Joseph went ahead with the wedding which made it better for her. But the gossips of Nazareth could count the months. Then a census was being taken. Why? The best information we have is that it had to do with more efficient collection of taxes throughout the Roman Empire. That doesn't inspire happiness either. Because of the census, Mary and Joseph travelled from Nazareth in the Galilean north to Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem – a distance of some 70 miles as the crow flies. That's an easy journey with our modern transportation, but how did they make the journey? We aren't told. Artistic imagination has been kind to Mary and given her a donkey to ride, but even riding a donkey while being almost full-term would be no picnic. And then of course there was no room for them in the inn. We imagine a cozy manger with fresh hay and no manure or flies. In reality, the whole situation seems to have been much less than ideal. Yet the angel proclaimed, "I bring you good news of great joy!"

Joy isn't merely happy circumstances. It is the ability to rejoice in our salvation in spite of our circumstances; the ability to rejoice in God's ability to redeem; the ability to live with an eternal perspective and rejoice that our lives have meaning and purpose beyond what we are going through.

The setting I was in last evening was not a happy one. But there was joy! There was deep joy as the young lady battling cancer shared that she wants the testimony of her life to be that God is good and He is for us no matter what circumstances we are going through.



Brian serves as executive director of CMC. He and his wife, Sharla, live in Marysville, Ohio, and are involved in community outreach and worship ministry at Lighthouse Fellowship.



“Mistakes Were Made...” (Part 11)

BY JEWEL SHOWALTER

“Don’t Cry Over Spilled Milk”

If you’ve been tracking with Rosedale Bible College’s *Beacon* articles in 2022, you’ve heard writers speak soberly of cringe-worthy mistakes we’ve made as a church. There’s been erroneous biblical interpretation, pharisaical nonconformity, botched race relationships, and sincere mission efforts that led to unintended consequences.

So, what is a Jesus response to mistakes we now see and own, blind eyes opened to see new truths? Perhaps like the blind man in Mark 8, we first begin to see “men like trees walking.” But as Jesus continued to touch and heal, the truth unfolded, and the blind man came to see things as they truly were.

The blind man wasn’t the only one confused about what he was seeing and who was healing him. There were plenty of “conspiracy theories” swirling around about the identity of Jesus. In Matthew 16:13, he asks his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (paraphrased).

They replied, “Some say Elijah, John the Baptist raised from the dead, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets...”

“But what about you? Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked.

Then Peter saw clearly. “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!”

This was a divine insight. Peter saw clearly and supernaturally through all the “conspiracy theories” of his day. Even though his sight was still partial, he was on the right track and revelation continued to unfold. Then there was Saul on the road to Damascus, going full tilt in the wrong direction, making deadly mistakes before he was struck down, blinded for three days, and irrevocably changed.

Can we—like the blind man, the first disciples, and Saul on the Damascus Road—hold our strong beliefs and practices up against the “plumb line” of Jesus, the Word of God—experiencing his touch and truth? Can we grow to have “the mind of Christ”—opening ourselves to be led by his Spirit into “all truth?”

Of course that’s what we want. We want to see clearly. But like the blind man and the early disciples—we don’t always get it—especially at first glance. We have our histories, experiences, short-sightedness, desires, prejudices, blind spots.

I enjoy the everyday truth of proverbs like – “Don’t cry over spilled milk; He just swept the crumbs under the rug; That ship has sailed; You made your bed, now lie in it.” These pithy sayings

share conventional wisdom about how to deal with mistakes. But how would Jesus have us respond to “spilled milk”?

When God opens our eyes to the fact that “mistakes were made”—we can humbly repent and make amends as much as possible. Let’s try a few Jesus-edits to our culture’s conventional wisdom:

“Don’t cry over spilled milk—but mop up the floor and buy a new jug!” This speaks of damage control, restitution, and generosity in spite of our “spills.”

“He just swept the crumbs under the rug—but let’s clean the floor, shake the rug, and bake a fresh loaf of bread.” Dirt—physically and spiritually—piles up. There will be a stench if we don’t take out the garbage. But nothing smells better than fresh bread!

“That ship has sailed—but we’re building a new and better ship.” Yes, sometimes we “miss the boat” because of fear, procrastination, or wrong information, but God is a God of redemption, new beginnings.

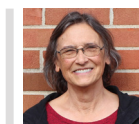
“You made your bed, now lie in it—but I’ll be glad to help wash your sheets.” While it’s true that our choices often lock us into certain consequences, Jesus offers cleansing and fresh starts.

In 1978 when we were planting the Mechanicsburg (OH) Christian Fellowship, I posted a large saying on our refrigerator door: “The truth will set you free—but first it will make you miserable!” That youthful season of ministry was filled with uncomfortable stretching, trial and error, embarrassing self-awareness. Seeing and owning our failures and mistakes is humbling and painful. But thank God when we see, for the truth frees! It’s much more dangerous to blindly persist in the wrong direction. Of course our sight is limited. We’re glancing in a cloudy mirror (I Cor. 13:12). We see “men as trees walking.” We don’t at first recognize the words and works of Jesus on the Emmaus Roads of our lives.

Mistakes will be made—until we see Jesus face to face and “know even as we are known.” And even as we pursue the truth, we must hold it graciously, humbly—and not alone.

“Ignorance is **not** bliss!”

“A stitch in time saves nine!”



Jewel serves in development and communications at Rosedale Bible College. She loves the gracious pursuit of truth that happens at RBC and in the broader church.



God Is Moving: REACH 2022

BY MADALYN

On the evening of November 18, 2022, eleven REACHers gathered together with their close friends, family, and some Rosedale International (RI) staff at Rosedale Bible College. During a time of celebration and commissioning, they shared about the experience of discipleship training school (DTS) and the approach of outreach.

Marking a full return to post-pandemic rhythms, both 2022-23 REACH teams will complete their outreach overseas. Making up **Team Senegal** are Ethan (OH), Emily (PA), Lily (OH), Mackenzie (OH), and Isaac (PA). Leading them is Connor (PA), a REACH alum who traveled to Zambia in 2018 before returning to serve as RI Facilities Intern in 2020. Leading **Team Albania** is Ellen (OH), part of 2021's Team Albuquerque. She's thrilled to lead her own team—Lance (OH), Megan (DE), Julianna (PA), and Seth (WA)—this year.

Since arriving at the Rosedale International Center (RIC) in August, these young believers have dug deep into many different aspects of faith. They've invested in various Columbus outreaches and taken prayer walks in the neighborhood surrounding the RIC. They've fasted, prayed, and studied the Bible together. They've learned about spiritual warfare; the fruits of fear and pride; expecting the Holy Spirit; rediscovering the Bible; and resolving conflict—among many other topics. And though intense and difficult at times, these three months of DTS have been a transformative season of spiritual healing and growth.

"I am learning how to trust God with my heart," Julianna shared. "I've seen so much growth in my walk with Christ. God is using this season for good, and I can't wait to keep listening to what he wants me to do!" Lily echoed this sentiment: "God is moving in big ways in this group! He continues to love and guide us through the ups and downs and shows his love for us through each other."

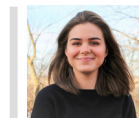
As they've grown in their individual relationships with God, the REACHers have also grown in their interpersonal relationships with each other. "I've been learning how to be a better team member—how to communicate my needs," Megan reflected. "I've been learning how to care for and love my teammates in the ways that are best for them."

As this article moves through the final stages of editing, the REACHers will board the first of several planes as they make their way to their outreach locations. By the time of this article's publication, they will have just set foot in Senegal and Albania. As they step into outreach, what do the next six months hold for them?

Ellen, Seth, Lance, Julianna, and Megan will spend their time in Albania working closely with a young church plant. They will worship with this congregation weekly, and will volunteer with their children's and youth activities. In addition to this, they will build relationships through an afterschool program and make effort to engage with the local community. They hope to tend to the seeds planted by previous REACH teams.

While Team Albania builds on the work of past teams, Team Senegal will break new ground as the first REACH team to serve in Senegal. Connor, Lily, Isaac, Ethan, Emily, and Mackenzie will partner with local believers in a rural community. They will work to build relationships with the local children through various volunteer opportunities, and will spend time developing friendships with families in a nearby village.

As these eleven REACHers take their first steps into the great new adventure of outreach, they ask that you would lift them up in prayer. Sudden immersion into a new culture is never easy, especially with language differences. Ask for a smooth and quick transition, for ease of language learning, and for humility and courage. Pray for the teams as they continue to learn to live together; ask for unity, love, and understanding between them. Ask that God would be close to each of them, and continue to work in and through them. Above all, ask that he would be glorified.



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