

**And Now We Wait**  
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First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany  
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**Story** *Painted Turtle*, from *All Creation Waits* by Gayle Boss<sup>1</sup>

**Reading** by John Taylor

**Sermon/Reflection** Minister

I don't like waiting. I go to the grocery store early in the morning so I don't have to wait in line. At red lights, I start tidying my car. When I have a doctor's appointment, or go to the motor vehicle department or pretty much anywhere, I carry books, a laptop, things to occupy myself through any possible moments of waiting. Instant gratification is really more my thing. I'm not good at waiting.

So a spiritual practice of intentional waiting – doesn't feel like a natural fit for me.

And this time of year is complicated. On the one hand, there is a call to stillness. The shorter days and colder air seem to remind our bodies, at least, of our distant ancestors' waiting for the world to warm again. Sometimes, if I pause and pay attention, I can feel that longing to be simple and still and wait.

On the other hand, the holiday season isn't really designed for that kind of stillness. It can be an impossibly busy time - of social gatherings, shopping, gift-giving; perhaps the end of a semester or a frantic season at work. Too much to do to be still. No time to be still.

It can also be a time that is already too quiet - a time of felt absence that can be hard to bear.

But whatever else is going on, whether we find a stillness or not, whatever distractions we employ, we are waiting. All of us. Waiting for ... the day to arrive when we no longer live in fear; or waiting for healing, purpose, the test results, a vacation, the dog your family's been thinking about getting;

waiting to be older or stronger or wiser or just generally more together; we wait for justice, for love, for joy, for a light at the end of the tunnel. For a country that matches the vision we hold in our hearts. Perhaps we're waiting to believe in something. Or waiting for some help with our own salvation in this world, because we cannot do it by ourselves.

We're waiting for the unraveling of the status quo that is promised in that radical Christmas story. We're waiting for peace in nations at war. We're waiting for the time when a child - born to a poor, undocumented, dark-skinned woman - who grows up to defy an empire - is truly a cause for widespread celebration.

Oh yes, we're waiting.

Waiting can make us feel anxious, frustrated, discouraged, especially for those of us who do not like to wait. And, waiting can be used as a tool of oppression. Too often, people who are oppressed are told to wait for justice - that this isn't the right time or the right way to demand change. Wait, is the message, for some other future moment that never comes.

But the waiting of Advent isn't that kind of waiting. It is not the stillness of acquiescence. Nor is it the even the stillness that is good self-care, when we can fit it in. This is active waiting, keeping watch with an awareness that **something is happening, and more is coming, and each**

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<sup>1</sup> Gayle Boss, *All Creation Waits: The Advent Mystery of New Beginnings*, Paraclete Press (October 3, 2016).

**of us is a part of it.** The stillness, the intentional waiting of Advent allows us to step out of time, in a way - to pause, and reflect and open our hearts, and direct our energy toward what we are really waiting for, rather than into vortexes of holiday frenzy or despair.

This is the waiting of faith.

Not faith that is limited to belief in a doctrine or creed. This is deeper, the faith of the painted turtle, trusting that one day, yes, the world will warm again, and with it, our life.

That trust – that there is something ahead that’s worth waiting for - that is faith. The ability to experience anticipation while buried in the muck – that’s faith.

What might be different if we were to approach this season, this church, our lives, with more of that faith? What if we could be still, not as an escape, but trusting that stillness is actually part of the process that helps to bring about something worth waiting for? What if we too, shared the faith of the turtle, that we will emerge one day and live?

[[pause]]

With those questions in the air, I offer you another story from Gayle Boss – this one about the common eastern firefly.

[story omitted]

The fireflies died, but their light did not. And after a year of waiting in the dark earth, and then being completely transformed and reborn, that light rises to dance once again in this world.

Sometimes, it’s not the time to shine our light out into the world. Sometimes, we need to take a break, rest, wait ... change. It doesn’t mean the light is gone – this Advent season, one lesson from the natural world might be to give ourselves that waiting space that is part of the process, that is necessary before our light can shine again.

And sometimes, when we look at the world, the light we long to see can seem faded, even absent. There’s a lot of frustration and dismay right now about the state of the world. I feel it, and I’m hearing that I have some company. Another lesson from nature might be to give the world that waiting space that is part of the process of bringing that light once again to the surface.

The faith of Advent is a trust that the light still glows – and things are happening: within us, in this congregation, and out in the world. Something is happening. And more is coming. And we are a part of it. The light is sometimes buried, but it is still there, and it will return.

And the fireflies might offer one more important truth about the faith that carries us through the waiting. And for me - it’s the hardest truth. We are waiting for things that will come into being in their time, and their way. We may choose an active wait, but that doesn’t mean we’re in control. Part of this wait, part of the faith in the transformation to come - and that we help bring about - is also practicing letting things unfold on a timetable that is not ours.

This is not passivity or hopelessness – it’s a deep trust that warmth will return, and light will yet dance.

What are you waiting for? And perhaps more important, how will you wait?

Passively, hopelessly? Distracted by the many things that entice us away? Are you trying to push through the rest and the waiting that are part of the process, and control what is not yours to control?

Or, might we wait with the faith that things are happening, and that our light still flickers and will emerge in time?

Waiting with this kind of attention, trust and action is hard. It's certainly not something I want to do. But this year, it might be what we need.

So here's the last piece of my invitation into Advent. It's an invitation to, sometime during this week, create time to be still - and notice what you are waiting for, and how you are waiting and what is happening right now. And maybe, to tap into that place of trust deep within – that faith that something more is coming, and while we are not in control, we are needed.

And then make a little more space to just be, through the unfolding of time.

In the spirit of the faith of Advent, I invite you - right now - into a moment of stillness for some of that reflection or meditation or prayer.

Spirit of Life and Love,

whatever it is that we're waiting for,

wait with us.

Help us to wait with faith.

Show us hope, when we despair.

Let us know joy even as the light disappears,

and Love that is bigger than we imagine.

For these are challenging times. Wait with us.

And as we wait, may we ground our being

in the trust of the turtle,

the persistent glow of the firefly,

and the faith of a people committed to transformation,

and willing to do the work of waiting.

Let us wait – with faith and action - together.

May it be so.

Amen