

# Along the track

## Waiting

Waiting can be a real drag. In a world of instant communication, fast food, and easy travel (the Monash excluded!), most of us don't have to wait for much. Most things are usually 'on tap'. But sometimes we have to - we wait for test results; we wait for our loved ones to come home; we wait for the birth of a child, some wait for the change of seasons they don't like much... we just have to wait.

Waiting can teach us a lot. We can get impatient, irritable, aggressive even. Just consider the rise in road rage of late, for example. Or it can teach us to be creative, it can help us to learn to relax, to be less aggressive and impatient. Waiting slows us down, it is a window, a pause in the frenetic fast-paced world. It can make us think. It can teach us a lot about ourselves and our capacity to change.

Around the time of the coming of Jesus, there was an air of expectancy for those of the Jewish faith, a feeling that something was going to happen, someone was going to come. This time of waiting was called by scholars, 'the Messianic Expectation'. Some of those who were waiting had a very clear mindset about what they wanted, what they expected, what was going to happen. That is why some of them could simply not accept Jesus - he did not fit their expectations, he wasn't what they wanted. His conduct challenged their vision, their rigidity, their lack of ability to see where things had gone astray. Some of them were simply not willing to give up the power that the status quo afforded them. They weren't willing to re-evaluate the traditions, practices and restrictions of their faith which were alienating many. No, he wasn't The One - we will keep waiting.

Others used this time of waiting in a very different way. Some began to re-focus on their longing for God and God's ways. Had God abandoned them or was God still in God's creation, still guiding them, still part of their lives? Was God still faithful to the Covenant? Perhaps it was they who were not, perhaps things should be different.

John the Baptist used this time of waiting to call the people to *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*" (Matthew 3:2). John began inviting people to a change of mind and heart, to make themselves ready for the Coming of the Messiah. His message had a great impact on many. People began to make their way out to the wilderness to see and to hear John. Some came out of mere curiosity, perhaps, while others came to repent, confess their sins, and be baptised. Others (like the Sadducees and the Pharisees Matthew 3:7) may have come because they may have wanted to size up the competition.

John's preaching was a call to action. John called upon women and men to repent and to be baptised. Repentance includes sorrow and remorse, but it is also a change of heart and mind that results in a change of course, a change in lifestyle, a change in what we are doing, in how we are treating others. Repentance calls on us to open our minds and hearts to God's ways, which may not always be our ways!

Each year Advent comes along - it reminds us of this time of waiting for the Coming of Jesus. How will we use it? Like any period of waiting, it too can teach us a lot about ourselves. Advent waiting can be a reminder to pause, to become more sensitive of the work of God within us and within those around us. But only if we let it.

We may be surrounded by fast food or instant this or that, but there is nothing instant about you or I. We are a work in progress. It is a lifetime commitment, a journey of discovery and growth. The waiting of Advent asks the question, what 'star' are you following at the moment, what is leading you, giving you direction or motivation in your life? Advent gives us the chance to look at our longings, which are much deeper than just what we want - the things we really long for out of life, out of our relationships, out of our work, our commitments. It helps us recognise our own limitations and therefore our need of others, not the least of them being our need for God. This waiting gives us the chance to think about where we make room for God or has the pace of life taken over so that isn't a reality anymore?

This time of waiting gave the people of Israel a time to re-assess, to think again about how they saw their faith, how they saw their response to God. Some stayed as they were. Others saw the need for change, to be more merciful, less rigid. How do we see our response to God, our response to Jesus' message? If our faith means anything, it has to mean more than something that gives us re-assurance and comfort; it is more than just following rules. It means working at the way we live our lives, how we treat our neighbours, especially those who are poor or disadvantaged. Surely Jesus taught us that - in fact, He gave his life for it.

Regards  
**Jim Quillinan**

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)