

I was waiting at gate six at Bradley International Airport in Hartford, holding a boarding pass with a large "A." Since I am still learning my ABCs with a certain no frills, low-cost carrier and am



WAITING AT THE GATE

Advent is a time of audacious hope.

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usually relegated to the "B" or "C" group, I was feeling about as good as an English major passing a physics exam. I was in good shape, even given some of the horror stories I've heard from other travelers

recently, especially those who now check baggage because of the new rules regarding carry-on bags that has resulted in a rash of lost luggage.

But about the time we were scheduled to board, one of the ground crew members announced, "I've got some bad news." The plane was at the gate but the problem was the pilot. Because of numerous delays throughout the system that day, he was timed out. So they had to fly in a pilot from Philadelphia to Hartford to fly the plane to Chicago and then on to Seattle.

At the time, my patience was worn as thin as a razor's edge. But later the experience of waiting at the gate offered an Advent lesson—one that has less to do with patience and more to do with hope.

In the hustle and bustle of these weeks preceding Christmas, many of us find ourselves saying, "I don't know if I'm coming or going." The great theologian Karl Rahner tapped into this condition when

he wrote about the coming of Christ that Advent anticipates. "You tell me that you have already come, that your name is Jesus, Son

of Mary, and that I know in what place and what time I can find you," Rahner wrote. "That's all true, of course, Lord—but forgive me if I say that this coming of yours seems to me more like a going, more like a departure than an arrival."

As Rahner explores the great mystery of the incarnation, of God coming into the world not to clean up the mess we've made of creation but to redeem the mess through the blood of his Son, he points to the place where hope begins. "Slowly a light is beginning to dawn. I've begun to understand something I've known for a long time: God, You are still in the process of your coming."

This is where I find hope today: God isn't going anywhere. God is eternally, passionately, perpetually, and patiently in the process of coming in our lives. Evidence of this hope is in each of you who are reading this reflection, in the creation that surrounds us, and in the bread we break and the wine we pour at every Eucharist when we boldly proclaim that all of us, old or young, black or white, Catholic or Protestant, Muslim or Jew, straight or gay, woman or man, all of us are and will always be children of a living and loving God.

Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois captured the quality of hope Advent advises in the title of his latest book, *The Audacity of Hope*. He credits his



The New Creation

Reflections from the Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation

pastor in Chicago for the title of the book. The first time I heard the word “audacious” ascribed to hope was also in a sermon, not in Chicago but in Berkeley a few years ago. The homilist credited a liberation theologian for the idea that hope is audacious when we act as if what we believe or hope will happen has already occurred. For example, audacious hope is living in such a way that our daily prayer, “thy kingdom come,” has already been answered.

Living with audacious hope means we live as a kingdom people now—people who believe that Jesus Christ inaugurated the new creation when he lived and died and rose again. Jesus, though he was crucified and died, carried the resurrection within his body, his spirit, and his soul. When he rose from the dead, he no longer needed the body as the vessel. His spirit infused the bodies and souls of his followers to live in such a way that what we hope for in the future is already present today in you and me.

Audacious hope means we can make a difference as peacemakers even as the world is at war.

Audacious hope means we break the endless cycles of violence by beginning to form circles of listening, of healing, of hope where both victim and perpetrator can find a safe place, some common ground for justice and mercy, for truth telling and peacemaking.

Audacious hope means we play the role of John the Baptist as sirens in the night signaling the coming of the one who will save the day.

Hope needs to be audacious

and tenacious. With tender tenacity, we see how that for which we hope is already present within ourselves. The German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, had the audacity to write, “I believe in the night.” He believes in it because by being aware of the darkness that surrounds him, he looks inside and senses a “great presence stirring” within him. “I want to free what waits within me,” the poet writes. This light within—a light that will in time overwhelm the night—waits to be unleashed, set free.

This is the place where hope stirs in the dark, in the delay, in the waiting, the wondering, and the longing for home. As the writer and stained glass artist, mother of three and teacher of many, Gertrude Mueller Nelson, wrote, “The recovery of hope can only be accomplished when we have had the courage to stop and wait and engage fully in the winter of our dark longing.”

This is the audacious hope we nurture during the season that stretches from Advent to Epiphany. In our comings and goings, we wait at the gate of God’s grace and hope in a slow-growing light for a world that has grown so dark and dangerous because of violence and fear. As we wait, we draw strength from knowing that hope is not a fleeting feeling but, in the words of poet/president Vaclav Havel, “is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons. Hope is definitely not the same thing as opti-

mism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” Hope is quiet, steady. Hope quietly goes about her business and the business of hope is to keep dreams alive even when all evidence that dreams of peace come true seems to be buried beneath every increasing body counts of those killed in war and violence. Hope keeps dreams of peace afloat even when the tidal wave of terror threatens to drown truth and the harsh rhetoric of revenge and retribution causes the “tender compassion of our God” to sound like an empty promise.

Hope is mandatory for all who work for reconciliation. Unlike her distant relative, optimism, hope is there for the long haul. Optimism is flighty; hope is steady. Hope is what we need as we wait at the gate. Hope stays awake and sees even in the dark.

And sometimes, even sings. For as the Sufi poet Tagore reminds, “Hope is the bird that sings while the dawn is still dark.”

Discussion Questions

1. Waiting is one of the most difficult activities of human life. Why are we so impatient?
2. How can we use this Advent season to nurture audacious hope?
3. How do we demonstrate hope to those around us, who sometimes seem to be in hopeless situations?