

Waiting for Godot  
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December 4, 2016

What do you wait for? We all wait don't we? We are supposed to be in the present and we all wait. What do you imagine will be alleviated once you reach this place or state or condition and in this alleviation, who do you envision yourself to be? What does this future self have that you do not have now? What is she or he capable of that you are not capable of now? Maybe too we all wait to forgive and be forgiven more than anything else or to have the power to forgive and be forgiven.

Me, besides waiting for a vision of a future retirement that is sustainable, I wait for the strength to run a half marathon and I wait for the fortitude to not get a stomach ache when I am brave and of course to be forgiven and forgive myself for all that I have failed to do or that I did poorly; and I wait for humanity to wake up and stop tormenting each other when it is so much easier to be kind and when there is enough for everyone to have our basic needs met if we only agreed to share it more equitably.

Advent is a time when Christians anticipate the birth of Jesus believing that his arrival will change everything because they see him as a prophet of hope and love who will stand up in a world of injustice, offering those who have little, no matter their color, race, orientation, ability or class, the comfort of his love and protection, the salve of his words and his acceptance and of course, the unconditional love and forgiveness of a God who promises that there is always enough if not in this life then in the next.

Christians see Jesus as their savior when to be saved means more than to be accepted with all of our sins forgiven so that we can enter eternal life. Being saved for the Christian I know means also means learning how to embody the spirit of Jesus so that one can find the courage, faith, love and meaning to go on and to stand with those who are vulnerable.

There is a lot of waiting in advent for Christians, and yet they know what they are waiting for- their savior. What does it mean to wait when our savior is not a man who was birthed in a manger centuries ago but lives among us, between us, within us, before us, beside us, through us? What does it mean for us, what does it ask of us?

What does it mean when it is us who must fulfill the promise of love, of standing beside those who ache, who must stand up to the bullies and the tormentors, whether they are saints or officials, as Jesus did, and insist that all people deserve basic human rights? What does it mean to wait when we have to be the answer to our own prayers?

In the play by Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon wait for someone they call Godot, who is not god, who is a man they seem to know and who seems to know them. This man has more than they have. He has a home. He has servants. He has sheep and goats. Vladimir and Estragon have very little: torn clothes, ill fitting boots, turnips to eat. They wait and threaten to leave each other over and over again and then say they cannot leave each other or the barren place they are metaphorically tied to, because Godot expects to meet them there at any time.

Much has been made of this play and Beckett tired quickly by what he called "the endless misunderstanding(s)" of all of these interpretations. As far back as 1955, he remarked, "Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can't make out."<sup>1</sup>

Some have insisted Godot is full of theological meaning though Beckett said in response to this that: "Christianity is a mythology with which I am perfectly familiar so I naturally use it."<sup>2</sup> Though one cannot reasonably say that Beckett was devout and therefore cannot make a sound argument that Godot was supposed to be God.

Reading the play again, I was bemused at why it has captivated me for so many years. It is so simply done, repetitive and quite distasteful in many places, at one point a man who is a slave called *Lucky* is quite mistreated by all. And yet, I have not been able to shake it, the two men, Vladimir and Estragon, fighting and then loving each other in turn, and never being able to leave the spot that has them transfixed, the place to which Godot has promised to come for them. The play seems to ask a question that is never answered or answers a question that is never asked.

Gertrude Stein, dying, was asked by Alice B. Toklas, "If on the other side you learn the answer, let me know!" She replied, "What is the question?"<sup>3</sup>

Vladimir and Estragon consider hanging themselves on the only tree that is in their barren landscape but decide it too weak and their rope too short. They curse each other and then fall into each other's arms, they struggle in their poverty, their boots that are too small, their hoped for carrot that is usually a turnip day after day, their longed for Godot they are told evening after evening by his servant who is a young boy and tells them again that Godot is unable to come, but promises to come tomorrow.

They wait, they wait, they wait for Godot whom they believe will save them from waiting; who will offer them enough.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waiting\\_for\\_Godot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waiting_for_Godot)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel L Terrien, "A Theological Look at Waiting for Godot" *Theology Today* 46 no 2 Jul 1989, 139-153.

What is enough for you? What is your enough? Is it a home of your own? Is it secure retirement? Is it the ability to give to your children so that they be well and at peace? Is it better health? Is it the ability to live independently as you age? Perhaps peace of mind? Perhaps finding love and acceptance?

What is enough for you as a citizen of the world? That seniors have Medicaid and social security? That all have health care? That the middle class have jobs or retraining in new areas of employment? That the most unprotected in our society: women, children, LGBTQ folk, people of color, the disable, Muslims, immigrants are treated with dignity and respect? That the rights of animals are safe guarded? That our climate and earth are protected?

How do you wait? Do you wait angrily, impatiently, with fear? Sometimes perhaps. Do you wait with attentiveness, awareness, hope? Other times perhaps. Do you wait with love? Do you wait seeing each other?

That is the part of the play that moved me the most. Each evening when Godot's servant boy told Vladimir and Estragon that Godot could not come once more, the boy would ask, Would you like me to tell him anything? And Vladimir would answer, Tell him you saw us.<sup>4</sup>

As I read this over and over again, it struck me that each week I stand before you, looking at you, seeing you gathered here, waiting, hoping, loving, offering your gifts and presence and that we hold each other together in all of this and that we see each other, all of us, and that this seeing each other creates our sacred ground, the place where grace can come when grace is a love that cannot be explained, but that explains everything.

We are what we have been waiting for. We, as a community of faith, as a people who gather to hear what love is asking of us now, we, as a collective, as an intentionally gathered group of seeking, questioning, longing, doubting, fierce, loving, giving, wondering and wondering people are for whom we wait.

We are why we show up, in order to keep this faith, this love, this flame alive inside each of us, in order to discern what the best thing to do now is and in order to continue to find the courage and the love to do it, in order to see each other into our lives.

Vladimir and Estragon knew that Godot was not god. They knew he was human, that he was mortal and did not keep his promises. Godot kept them together, in each other's arms. That was the purpose of Godot. To keep them in community, to keep them whole, to keep them feeding and loving each other, to build the possibility of grace when grace is a love that cannot be explained, but that explains everything.

A Catholic friend who once told me that all religions rely on Unitarian Universalists

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 34.

to tell them what to focus on next in the world, to alert the world to what needs our attention most. The only way we can live into our mission now is to get clear about who we are, where we are, and find the strength to wait wide awake, fiercely, with love, with hope, with the expectation that we are enough, that we have what we need right now to be who we must be, that we can learn as we wait to love it all, the waiting, this canvas we paint while waiting, who we become while waiting, those we are learning to love while we wait.

The future I imagine, that I wait for, is one we can all live into with dignity, is one in which there is room for all identities, white, poor, rich, middle class, black, Latino, Asian, gay, straight, disabled, he, she and ze- all identities that manage a way to walk beside each other while telling a story that would have us understand that when the rights of anyone are trampled we are all made smaller, less whole, less capable of the greatness of our humanity.

There has to be a place for all of us, all of who we are right now, in this moment in all of our frailty and brokenness and imperfection and dearness too and the rest of humanity right beside us. Maybe if we learn to live into the former with more ease we might learn to accept the latter with less struggle?

I see you dear ones. I see you.

The fourteenth century mystic Fra Giovanni wrote:

There is nothing I can give you which you have not.  
But there is much, that while I cannot give, you can take.  
No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today:  
Take heaven!

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant:  
Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow.  
Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy:  
Take joy!

Amen