

An Advent and Christmas Letter from Lesley McLean, National Prayer and Spirituality Coordinator.

South Africa is a country like no other I have been to. That may sound as if I have been everywhere; I haven't. But even my limited knowledge and understanding of its history, its colonial past, the Anglo-Boer wars, apartheid and post-apartheid and the Anglican church's vibrant role there, did nothing had prepared me for how it is. And how it is, is framed around the character and experience of Nelson Mandela.

He is literally a colossus. His enormous statue, in front of the seat of government in Pretoria, stands with arms out stretched embracing its people. He is omnipresent; not only a face on t-shirts but the force of his intrinsic worth is evident in almost every aspect of life.

His worth was formed by waiting. This is the view of Desmond Tutu, the other colossus of South Africa, former Anglican Archbishop. His comment was writ large on a wall in the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg. "He went into prison an angry young man and he came out ... with the authority to say, let us try to forgive... Prison became a crucible that burned away the dross."

Waiting is what we do in Advent; the word means 'going towards that which is coming'. I am reminded of a duet, 'We hasten with eager yet faltering footsteps' (JS Bach's Cantata 78). Hastening, eager or faltering, doesn't seem to have much to do with waiting, which is more associated with lining for the bus, grinding one's teeth or drumming fingers. Waiting is usually related to passivity, fear, procrastination or avoidance. The busy person hates to wait, the impatient run away.

Waiting is an active, spiritual practice, it is an art to be consciously worked at, to be eagerly engaged, to be hastened towards. We falter, we stumble, but we attend to waiting on the good news of Jesus Christ.

Keeping an eye on the prize, that which is coming, is of principal importance. The prayers and study, which accompany this e-letter, will help enormously. Our focus in this Season is on Jesus, the Christ Child. By regularly setting aside a time and place to re-focus we can realign our thoughts and hopes.

It is said that Mandela decided to treat his guards with the same respect as he wished for all inhabitants of his beloved country. The loving, forgiving land he wanted, he created there, in prison. It is said that the authorities had to keep on changing the guards as they began to respond to Mandela's way.

May your waiting this Advent be filled with the desire for God. May each day bring you closer to the manger until you kneel with adoration and wonder at the gift of God in our Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Lesley

Advent and Christmas Worship and Study Material 2017

Dear Friends, As well as my e-letter I have adapted material from the UK website for your use.

Please find attached an Advent Calendar, a worship/study service and Prayers.

Lesley