THE WAITING GAME?

You do a lot of waiting – in life.
I started to learn about waiting from a very early age.

Every second Saturday, after my parents’ divorce, I had to meet my father at Central Station in Glasgow - at two o’clock - for his legally allowed contact visit.

He was on time about twice a year! Which meant a lot of “standing on the corner watching all the girls go by.” I know all about music to watch girls by! Maybe that’s when my problems all started!

But to live is to wait.
For buses, from jobs to come up – for maturity to arrive. For your girl-friend – for your wife. (Once your girl friend has become your wife!)

Patience is a necessary tool for life –and any who has travelled by train bus or plane knows that waiting is part of the deal.

“We apologise to travellers with Virgin trains for the late arrival of the 1500 hours from Bristol.” Yeah – been there!
Though not since I came to Geneva!

And there we were on the platform pacing up and down – glancing anxiously at our watches. Wondering if we’ll make our connection.

Frustration is sitting on a train for two hours at Darlington – and not even the free cup of British Rail tea offered to all weary and grumpy passengers n any way makes you feel better. A cup of British Rail tea was supposed to summon up the spirit of the Blitz! Now there’s optimism!
Maybe we just have to learn to accept it as part of the rich tapestry of life or something.
“I wait, therefore I am. I am, therefore I wait.”

Some things you just can’t hurry.
“You can’t hurry love – you just have to wait.”
It comes to you or it doesn’t – you can’t make it happen to your timetable.
Love seems to have its own timetable.

You can’t hurry maturity and wisdom – they come with time and experience – and there’s nothing more pathetic than some wee cut down man – some wee dolled up teenager trying to look older and be older and act than they are.
Just doesn’t work.

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Hospitals are spectacular epicentres of waiting.
No offence but they are. When you go to visit someone – as a minister, the most sinister words you can hear are...
"The nurses are with them – if you could just wait in the corridor. They’ll just be a few minutes.”

My advice – bring “War and Peace” and prepare to read a few chapters. There is no such thing as “a few minutes” in hospital parlance. This is not to complain – just to forewarn.

Whether it’s waiting to give birth – or for the Bride to arrive – personal best lateness record for a bride is 45 minutes. Another five and the groom was off I can tell you...
The waiting game is how it is for us.

Not that we like it much – the restless anticipation, the uncertainty – the time it all gobbles up – seems to fritter away. We want action now – not “sometime.”

We want delivery now - not at some unspecified future date. We live in a world where we want served immediately, answers on the spot – gratification now.

No one wants to wait. No one wants their wanting put on hold! The advert said it all...take the waiting out of wanting...

My granny didn’t like to wait for Christmas – she took a very pragmatic approach to Christmas. She would do all her Christmas shopping in late November, when the bargains would abound – and then she would insist that “Since our presents were already to hand – we should just have them now – and not bother waiting till Christmas !” So, we would sport our new pullover all during December – and just have to shrug when Christmas day came and there was nothing from Granny.

“Why wait?” – was her philosophy. It was immensely practical – but it lacked a certain something in romance, and sentiment and feeling for the event. Indeed, if everyone had taken her down to earth approach and eschewed the waiting – well, Christmas Day might have been just a tad anticlimactic.

For there can be something thrilling, intriguing and developing about waiting.. the build - up of excitement and anticipation – the discipline of holding back – leading to the extra dimension of thrill and delight as the long-awaited moment comes.
The Waiting Time can be a creative time.

Why did parents not think of more difficult places to hide Christmas presents?
Top of the wardrobe – under the bed. Meat and drink to a curious ten year old. Oddly-shaped parcels to be shaken, sniffed and maybe a little bit of the wrapping paper torn just to see if it was Cleudo or Monopoly in that flat, oblong box – and was it a Cadbury or a Rowntree Selection box?

Christmas – the excitement is building – little indictators here and there – little increments that build up the anticipation...
Christmas lights beginning to sparkle –Around the city....choirs getting down to serious practising -  first dribble of cards from abroad...endless adverts pumping up the volume.
Charity card catalogues plopping through the door. It’s underway. We begin to feel the tempo become more urgent.

But we’ll just have to wait. Soon, but not yet.
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The people of the Old Testament were always waiting. Waiting for one thing or another.
To be delivered from slavery – to find their promised land – to enjoy peace in the promised Land – to be brought home from their humiliating exile in Babylon – waiting for the Messiah – who would bring them guaranteed peace and prosperity – waiting for God to put things right in the world. Once and for all. Waiting for the Kingdom of God.

Sometimes their patience snapped and the business of waiting became torture for them and they lashed out at God whose sense of timing they could not comprehend.
“Give it to us now. Now. How long must we endure this waiting?”

The only assurance God gives is his promise that he will deliver them – that they can rely on his word and his commitment to them.
The light will break into the darkness – the love will overpower the hatred – the Day of the Lord will come – they can be assured of that. They can believe in that with their whole heart. The Lord has given his word that he will not abandon or forget them.

But he will bring their deliverance in his own time, and in his own way. His own astonishing and surprising way.

And in the meantime – use the waiting time creatively, embrace and explore the waiting time so that the joy of the denouement, the final act of the drama can be heightened.

The season of Advent now begun is our time of waiting – preparing ourselves for the glorious birth of hope and deliverance.
It needn’t be a time full of tension and stress – of hurried obligations and pressing demands to fulfil some arbitrary and manufactured schedule.
In fact, the tools are all in place for us to fill that waiting time with meaning
– we can follow the liturgical calendar – open our Advent Calendars – light our Advent candles, sing our songs of preparation and expectation.
– There is no rush – there need be no pressure.
– Instead there is time and space to ready ourselves – focus our minds, concentrate on the wonder that waits to be revealed to us...

– As the watchman waits for dawn – we know for sure that morning will come – and the light of the world will blaze into our lives and into our world like a supernova of grace and glory.
This is what we are waiting for. This is the promise of God that will surely come.

So we wait not with fingers cross and agitated hearts, but with the quiet expectation of those who know that God’s promise can be trusted. Soon and very soon – we shall see the king. And this table is the earnest of that...the foretaste of the promises...the trailer for the glorious future that he holds and shares with us...Here we find our certainties deepened...
If this...then everything..
If this kind of loving...an end to fear...
When we sit with the whole church -past and present
And take bread and wine..
We know in whom we put our trust
And that is promise is sure...
Soon and very soon...
We shall see the King

AMEN.