

My daughter Mary Frances loves Kindergarten. She told me she wanted ALL the days to be Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, with no Saturdays and Sundays, so that she could go to Kindergarten EVERY day. On many occasions, Todd or I have asked Mary Frances what she likes about Kindergarten, or what the best part of her day at Kindergarten was. Her answers vary and have included playing in the housekeeping center, making a beautiful project in the art center, going to the library and checking out a book about koala bears, learning to read (yes, they do that in Kindergarten now, if you haven't looked at a Kindergarten curriculum in a while), singing a song about an alligator, getting ice cream in the cafeteria, making new friends, playing with her old friends, swinging on the playground, seeing her brother Josh in the cafeteria, making a monster house with her class in time for Halloween, and being an Indian holding corn in the Thanksgiving play.

On a few occasions, I've asked Mary Frances if there's anything she DOESN'T like about Kindergarten. Her answer has always been YES. And when I've asked her what it is she doesn't like, her reply has always been consistent. She doesn't like WAITING. Waiting on the rug for all of her classmates to arrive each morning, waiting for everyone to finish cleaning their centers, waiting for everyone to wash their hands, and, what is

apparently the worst wait of all – waiting for the Afterschool program to begin. When the dismissal bell rings at 2:40, children enrolled in the Afterschool child care program walk to the cafeteria, where Afterschool meets. From what I can surmise, Mary Frances is one of the first children to arrive in the cafeteria. She is to sit quietly, waiting, until all of the children arrive. Then begin the Afterschool activities, which include playing on the Big Playground, having snack, playing Candy Land and Connect Four, and doing homework. When I asked her what was so bad about this arrangement, she said, Mama, it takes SOOOO long for the fun stuff to start. I told her, Honey, I sympathize. I don't like waiting either.

I'm not sure I can help Mary Frances understand that getting 20 children ready to do the same thing at the same time, necessitates some waiting. However, I know, as all of us do, that waiting is hard. In my own life, I wait for the flu to pass as I write this reflection, I wait for my course eval results to be posted to see how my students rated my courses, I wait a little longer to see my extended family since we were sick over Thanksgiving and couldn't make the trip. I wait during these small moments, events of my daily life. And I wait in anticipation of the life-changing and defining moments – waiting for results of medical tests, waiting for a dear one's

struggle with illness to be over, waiting to say “I do,” and to hear “It’s a boy!” and “It’s a girl!”

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As I prepared this meditation, I asked Mary Frances how the waiting at school was going, especially the waiting for Afterschool to start. She said, It’s better now, Mama. You can talk to your friends in whisper voices.

Ahh. Though the big fun of Afterschool has not yet begun, you can talk to your friends in whisper voices. There is a way to find meaning in and enjoy those long minutes of waiting.

As Mary Frances found meaning in her waiting, may we all find meaning in ours, especially during this season of Advent. Advent is a quiet season, a time for reflection and of expectant hopefulness. Advent does not hold the excitement of the coming events of our liturgical calendar - of Our Savior’s birth; of the heavenly hosts proclaiming the Good News; of shepherds worshipping the newborn Savior; of a bright, beautiful star leading the way to the Lord; of the magi bringing gifts to a very young Jesus; of Joseph dreaming of an angel of the Lord and then stealing Mary and Jesus away to safety in Egypt in the dead of night.

While Advent is admittedly low on excitement, it is high on meaning.

Waiting holds so many lessons for us. While Mary waited for Jesus's birth, she prayed. In her prayers, she came to an understanding of God's work in the world and through time, which she expressed as "showing strength with his arm", as "lifting up the lowly", as "filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty." In her prayer, Mary also saw herself clearly, recognizing that though "lowly," the Lord had looked upon her with great "favor," so much favor, that "surely, from now on all generations [would] call [her] blessed."

Mary did not wait alone. For three months, Mary visited her relative Elizabeth, whose unexpected journey of carrying John the Baptist was so similar to her own.

Mary also shared her waiting with Joseph, who, as suddenly as Mary, had his life changed forever, and was determined to be faithful to God's new calling to him -- by going ahead with his plans to wed Mary and by naming the baby she bore - Jesus.

While she waited, Mary prepared for what we now know as perhaps the most iconic journey in the story of Christianity -- the one she and Joseph

made from their hometown of Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born.

While she waited, Mary surely knew a closeness to God and a sureness of her calling that she had never known before. A closeness she could not have known, maybe, had she not had a season for prayer, for sharing her waiting with her companions, for preparing for her journey.

In this season of quiet waiting and expectant hopefulness, may each of us pray, and in praying see both God and ourselves more clearly. May each of us be blessed with companions with whom we talk in whisper voices while we wait. And may each of us know, as Mary did, closeness to God and a new sureness of our calling as God's own. Amen.