

**The Geography of Waiting: Becoming the Way Prepared**  
Jill Y. Crainshaw\*

**dust waiting**

dust stood still,  
suspended  
in sunlight—

the walls  
held their breath.  
we did too—

“for we are dust;  
to dust we shall return”

betwixt and between,  
a promise:

stars will bedazzle  
nighttime fears

peace will saturate  
the air we breathe.

we will dance—  
our feet,  
“how lovely  
on the mountain” —  
leaving a trail of stars  
in dusty places.

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yes. we will—  
but for now,  
dust stands still.  
we hold our breath,

waiting.

But haven't we waited long enough?

To announce and encourage a *season* of waiting sometimes feels preposterous. Too many people endure enforced waiting every day—waiting for food, for safety, for breath. Too many paths through their life's wildernesses are blocked by human wreckage. Some people's skies seem empty of sacred signs, and they can't see a way through the starless night.

Yes, the realities of racism, violence, food insecurity, political unrest make it hard for me to light the candles of Advent and sing the season's hymns of waiting. Haven't we waited long enough?

I wrestled with these thoughts as the prelude began in my church on that first Sunday in Advent. Then, with no rehearsal or liturgical prompting, three children formed a circle at the front of the church and began to dance. Their joy reached out into the sanctuary and, for a few moments at least, quieted my spirit.

Each year during the liturgical season of waiting, we hear that "voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way.'"

My restless spirit wants to ask: "Where is this place of hope, peace, love, and joy that we are preparing the way to? When will we get there? Lives are at stake.

I am restless for gospel justice and peace to come soon, to dwell here in our earth-places.

How long, O Lord?"

That Advent Sunday, an unexpected response burned away the fog of unknowing.

Those dancing children. They sparked in me a new imagining.

What if—

yes— what if the sacred Star-flinger who sequined the skies in the beginning with light is now sowing life into hungry and thirsty wildernesses by sending us—you and me—out to be lights of grace and peace. What if—what if by our everyday actions of care, we are preparing a way to places where God’s light draws tender plants of hope up out of wintering soil to feed hungry people?

### **advent prelude**

december sun puddled on the sanctuary carpet.  
splashing in the light, they swirled, twirled,  
danced while people settled into empty pews.  
child poet-prophets, eight years, five, only three,  
they swayed, tender trees seeking, reaching,  
spilling morning gold from their hands,  
unrehearsed, as far as we knew, and unplanned  
except perhaps by angels, if you believe in such things.  
we heavy-footed grownups beheld them, wondering.  
and they danced on, in the light,  
in front of the remembrance table where  
bread is broken, baptismal promises spoken and where  
on that day? innocent joy  
graced wilderness-weary waiting eyes  
with a wreath of swirling, spinning stars.  
the music stopped, and they scampered  
away down the aisle. I rubbed my eyes—  
yes. their feet left a trail of stardust.  
the way was prepared.

Their dance became a map. A new geography of hope. In their movements, the sanctuary remembered—we all remembered. *We* are the place. We are the place where joy can interrupt despair without denying it.

That day, the sanctuary became more than a building. It became a teacher. A holding place for faithful hopes and promises. The quiet air hummed with a wisdom easy to forget or ignore in a world noisy with despair and uncertainty.

The children's dance spoke in a language older than words, reminding us that God's presence stirs even in waiting-places. Their feet traced a map across the carpet, charting a way through the wilderness. Their joy mapped possibility into our waiting.

And I saw it then: the geography of waiting is not fixed. It shifts beneath our feet when we move with hope. Each act of mercy redraws its boundaries. Each gesture of kindness widens its horizon. The places we inhabit, places like sanctuaries, shelters, schools, neighborhoods, are the soil where God's justice is already taking root. And we ourselves are such places too. We are living geographies where divine light and justice take root, where hope learns to move and breathe.

The geography of waiting turns out to be alive with light, with God's light in us. The way is prepared. Let us go.

### **A Prayer for the Way Prepared**

#### **Genesis God,**

You breathed life  
into dust,  
particles of places  
becoming a wandering,  
longing,  
dancing,  
hoping,  
waiting  
people.

#### **Advent God,**

Breathe again  
into dusty places—

Breathe into us.  
Enliven our feet  
so that what  
once waited—  
fearful and uncertain—  
now shimmers  
with hope.

## **Resurrecting God,**

The promise is now —  
a place,  
a people.

We are stardust.  
Let us go  
to light the way.

### **Author's Note**

“The Geography of Waiting: Becoming the Way Prepared” reflects on an Advent morning when spontaneous dance in a sanctuary reimagined waiting as a living, participatory hope. Blending poetry and prose, the piece invites readers to see both the places they inhabit and their own lives as the geography where divine light and justice take root. Through breath, movement, and embodied waiting, the reflection reminds us that we ourselves are sacred places where participatory hope takes root and where God calls us to become the way prepared.