

“Wait No More!”
CHRISTMAS EVE 2009
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For the past month I have been talking about WAITING.

Waiting for Love
Waiting for home
Waiting to belong
Waiting for peace

But the truth is, most of us have just been waiting for Christmas to get over.

And in the next 12 hours or so, we will begin to think about what we have to return to the stores and the terrible ordeal that is going to be.

I came across this great story about a woman who was Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at row after row of toys and hearing both her children asking for everything they saw in the store, she finally made it to the elevator with her two kids.

She was feeling what so many of us feel during the holiday season time of the year: overwhelming pressure to go to every party,
every housewarming,
taste all the holiday food and treats,
getting that perfect gift for every single person on our shopping list,
making sure we don't forget anyone on our card list,
and the pressure of making sure we respond to everyone who sent us a card.

Finally the elevator doors opened and it was packed.
Somehow she managed to push her way into the car and dragged her two kids in with her and all her purchases.
When the doors closed, she couldn't take it anymore and stated, “Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, strung up and shot.”

From the back of the car came a quiet calm voice that everyone heard: “Don't worry, we already crucified him.”

Last week in my email, I pointed out to you a fascinating website → it is called Advent Conspiracy. I hope that some of you took the time to look up the website. But in case you didn't let me tell you a little bit about it.

In 2007, a number of churches banded together to create a sort of “conspiracy.” Their goal was to undermine the empire – NOT the United States of America → no their goal was to undermine the Empire of Christmas Consumption.

The Advent Conspiracy is an international, inter-church movement that is, in their words: “restoring the scandal of Christmas by substituting compassion for consumption.”

The movement encourages people to embrace four themes during the Advent season:

- **Worship More** — Worshiping Christ *can* and should become the greatest and most enjoyed focus of the season.
- **Give More** — God gave his Son as a relational gift; → so the goal should be for us to give more meaningful, relational and experiential gifts instead of just expensive ones.
- **Spend Less** — Decrease the volume of purchasing and receiving costly Christmas gifts.
- **Love All** — In the Advent, Jesus enters our poverty so we will no longer be poor. With the money saved by giving relationally and resisting consumerism, we can redistribute that money to the “least of these” in our communities and the world.

The campaign flies in the face of many of our comfortable Christmas traditions. Hence the notion of being at a true “Advent Conspiracy.”

The hope is that consumerism will be replaced with compassion.

And I don't care what ministry you are drawn to.

Whether it is Advent Conspiracy's Living Water project

1.8 million people die every year from water born illnesses. That includes 3,900 children a day.

The solution to this problem is drilling a fresh water well

\$10 will give a child clean water for life.

Or Heifer Project

Which provides animals to people in impoverished African Villages, believing the adage that by giving them a sustainable animal they will have milk, cheese and other necessities.

Or Compassion International

In Which you can sponsor a child's school uniform and books for the year

Or World Vision

has a gift-giving program that allows individuals to donate an alpaca, a goat, a pig, fishing kits, scarves and more

Or Bread For the World

Or Kiva

In which people can make loans to specific entrepreneurs in the developing world, "empowering them to lift themselves out of poverty."

But you certainly don't have to look to far beyond our walls to find need

Capes House

Or LARRI

Or → You fill in the blank

The Advent Conspiracy is not about *no* giving, just *different* giving.

Value-driven giving.

Creative giving.

Low-cost giving.

Discipleship giving.

Giving to need and not giving to want.

Tonight, while we are comfy and warm here at Ridge Church one-sixth of the world does not have access to clean drinking water.

And ultimately what is more beneficial to our children or our grandchildren's growth and development → another flashing, chirping, battery-eating Toy-of-the-Month, or the knowledge that being a follower of the baby whose birth we

celebrate tonight involves the sacrifice of forgoing some of our desires on behalf of others' needs?

Two years ago, when this Conspiracy was first conceived, the partner church collected over \$2.5 million dollars that was donated to a charity that provides clean drinking water wells to places where contaminated water multiplies disease rates.

This amount may seem small when compared to the billions spent on Christmas gifts each year.

But the impact is clear if you take the time to read the weblogged stories and watch the online videos chronicling how many wells have been drilled from this money and how many people have been given access to something that we never think twice about in America — drinkable water.

A 2006 Gallup holiday survey indicated that weekly worshipers spent an average of \$800 on Christmas gifts while those who never attend worship services spent an average of \$853 on gifts.

In other words, Jesus makes about a \$53 difference on Christmas spending.

Let that soak in for a minute. People who are attending church *weekly* spend only six percent less than those who never darken your doors.

If that statistic is correct, then St. Nick trumps the baby Jesus in setting the values of Christmas.

We need a serious re-examination of how we spend money, and how we celebrate the birth of this baby.

We have been waiting for Christmas – and now it is here.

We have spent all the money → there is nothing we can do about that now → and please → don't feel guilty.

But what I want you to feel is the opportunity.

We have been talking about WAITING for the past month.

Let's stop waiting.

Let's start living as if every day was Christmas!

Let's begin today to think about how we want to spend our resources for the next year, so that when Advent runs around we too will be part of the great conspiracy.

Take some time and read about Advent Conspiracy, so that you can begin to act now.

And live as if every day is Christmas.

It's funny how we act differently at Christmas Time
We tend to be more generous

Don't wait for Christmas → live Christmas every day!

If we really believe that "Jesus is the Reason for the Season," then let's follow Jesus and not the empire.