

Waiting...

Isaiah 11:1-10
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First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

Debie Thomas, in her article titled “Learning to wait,” says, “I don’t live in a culture that helps me to wait In fact, just the opposite is true – I live in a culture that worships instant gratification; ... solutions to all of my problems right now.

I live in a world where I can order just about anything on Amazon, and find it on my doorstep within 24 hours. A world where I can send a text, an email or a Facebook message across the ocean and have it arrive near-instantaneously. A world where I have 24/7 access to information, healthcare, nourishment and shelter.

In this cultural economy,” says Thomas, “delays are a waste of precious time. Worse, delays are automatic reasons to doubt the love and goodness of God. And yet as I look at Scripture,” she says, “I find that waiting is not only the norm, it’s nearly a vocation.

Thomas concludes by saying, “Just a few weeks ago, I heard an elderly woman say, ‘Two thousand years. And still we wait.’ She wasn’t complaining, exactly. But her words were a sigh, and I could feel her tiredness in my bones.”¹ Tired of waiting.

In today’s Old Testament lesson, Isaiah is speaking to a people tired of waiting, waiting for the Messiah, whom we know to be Jesus the Christ, whom we wait for in anticipation of his return, when all things will be made right again.

The season of Advent is all about waiting. Waiting for your favorite Christmas carol to be sung in worship – don’t worry, we’ll get to it; O Come, O Come Emanuel – waiting for the magic of the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service, waiting for the joy of Christmas morning, waiting for the fulness of Christ.

And all year long, we find ourselves waiting for that which never seems to come – the promise of joy amid heartache, ease amid struggle, abundance amid scarcity, peace amid infighting and hostility, love amid bitterness and hate. How do we go through life without that which the Lord has promised us.

It’s not easy. And the truth is, we need the Lord to do it, to faithfully wait for that which is yet to come. That’s why Isaiah assures us saying, “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

¹ Debie Thomas, “Learning to wait,” JourneyWithJesus.net, September 3, 2017. Retrieved June 4, 2019.

A shoot growing from a stump; have you ever seen such a thing? It's pretty amazing. New life coming from that which seems dead and lifeless, hope springing from hopelessness.

Whatever situation you're facing right now that has you feeling hopeless – whether it's medical issues and physical weakness, money and finances, family relationships – whatever it is, there is a way to be at peace even amid the worry and upset.

When Isaiah says that Jesus will bring to his people "... the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord," that's not something we have to wait for.

In Christ we have the wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of God – a respect for God – that's needed to give us peace. Ours is merely to believe it and receive it.

Believe it, believe that Jesus is standing at your side, guiding you through your struggles, big and small. Believe that Jesus has placed in your heart the wisdom to know what to do next, even if that is to wait, wait faithfully – full of faith – amidst your struggle. Believe that in Christ, we know all we need to know to live peaceably alongside one another and faithfully in the sight of God. Believe and then receive.

Our problem – even for those who do believe – is that we don't receive. We're not very good at receiving what the Lord so dearly wants to give us. We get tired of waiting and we begin taking instead. We take from others because we're afraid there isn't enough. We put others down trying to build ourselves up. We wall off the very people God sends to guide us and comfort us. Or worse yet, we fail to help out that person God sends our way.

Consider the man asleep next to his wife who was awakened at 3:00 a.m. by loud pounding on the door to the house. He gets up and goes to the door where he finds a drunken stranger, standing in the pouring rain, asking for a push.

"Not a chance," says the husband, "it is 3:00 in the morning!" He slams the door and returns to bed. "Who was that?" asks his wife. "Just some drunk guy asking for a push."

"Did you help him?" she asks. "No, I did not, it is 3:00 in the morning and it is pouring rain out there!"

"Well, you have a short memory," says his wife. "Can't you remember about three months ago when we broke down, and those two guys helped us? I think you should help him."

So, the man gets dressed and goes out into the pounding rain. He calls out in the dark, "Hello, are you still there?"

"Yes," comes the answer. "Do you still need a push?" "Yes, please!" "Where are you?" "Over here, on the swing set."

Asking for and receiving help from others – that’s the hardest thing for us to do when we’re truly down on our luck and lost in our struggles. But that’s just when God wants to help us the most, just when we truly do need the Lord’s wisdom and understanding.

In the wisdom and understanding of the Lord, says Isaiah, Jesus does “not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor and decide with equity for the oppressed”

Jesus is always on the side of those who are oppressed, those who are struggling, those who lack the basic necessities of life. And that includes each and every one of us when we’re feeling lost and left out. When you’re weighed down by oppressive thoughts and attitudes, Jesus is here to lift you up. Where we see “That won’t work,” “I can’t,” “There’s no hope” – Jesus sees possibility and promise, just there for the waiting.

“Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist” says Isaiah, “and faithfulness the belt around his loins.” It’s righteousness and faithfulness that we need to stand strong as we wait on the Lord.

Righteousness – doing the next right thing in the eyes of God – that will never let you down. And faithfulness – trusting in and waiting upon the Lord – it will never leave you wanting. So don’t allow any momentary heartache to wall you off from the joy that God desires for you. Don’t give up amid your struggles, not when Jesus is there to ease the way.

Don’t let yourself be blinded by thoughts of scarcity amid the abundance of God, the blessings of the Lord. And never, never go to bed in a tangle of bitterness and hate, but rather, rest assured in the promise of the love and peace that God will bring at the break of day, in the season to come. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Compassionate God, in this time of darkness, we wait for the One who will come and redeem us. As we prepare for the merriment of the season and the sparkle of decorations, we need to remember there are also many for whom the holiday season isn't one of joy and good cheer.

We pray for those who cannot see the light in the darkness, that they would find hope – not in the commercial side of Christmas – but in the promise of the Christ child.

We pray for those who struggle to feel joy because they're mired in mounting bills and in despair for lack of employment, that they would have faith that you will provide. We pray for our military families who are separated by great distance from their loved ones, whose tables have an empty seat this Christmas, that they would rely on you for strength and protection.

We pray for those whose family dynamics make holidays – not a time of festive joy – but of stress and anger. We pray that through your grace, hearts can be softened, old hurts can be released and a door might be opened to reconciliation.

We lift our joys and give over our concerns as we pray for those in our family of faith dealing with health issues. We pray for those who grieve this Advent season. Help them to know your comfort and find hope in the promise of the resurrection. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, the One who was, is and will come again, as we join in the prayer that he taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.