

Isaiah 1:1,10-20  
Psalm 33:12-22  
Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16  
Luke 12:32-40

Proper 14C  
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island  
August 11, 2019  
The Rev. Karen Haig

## Waiting

Wait! Wait your turn! Wait a minute! Wait for your sister! Wait in line, wait for the ferry, wait for the call, wait for the check, wait for the right time, wait for the test results. Hey, wait for me! Wait.

There is a lot of waiting going on in the stories we've heard today. Abraham waited decades for the promised inheritance, Sarah waited long past her prime for the child who promised a future not just for her but for all God's people. Isaac and Jacob waited for what seemed like forever in those nomadic tents, thieves wait for the perfect opportunity to break in and steal, and slaves wait up all night for masters who may or may not show up. Waiting can be hard... I typed those words during hour #2 of waiting for the ferry in Seattle.

What happens for you when you wait? Do you get cranky? Do you read that book you're always carrying with you? Do you pull out your phone and check your mail, watch youtube videos or look stuff up? Do you start talking to the people around you? Maybe work on your sermon? Are you able just to wait? To wait with rapt attention and great anticipation? To wait with an expectant heart? To wait, knowing that something is surely about to happen? Are you able to be dressed for action with your proverbial lamps lit, even if only to be left waiting? Can you imagine how waiting – simply waiting – can be active, alive and vibrant? It can be, you know.

Sometimes when we're waiting, especially if we're waiting for something that matters deeply – a much-needed job, a medical diagnosis, news of the baby or your mom, a child who cannot be reached and is three hours late coming home - when we're waiting for something that matters deeply, we can feel very alone. We're so preoccupied and full of anxiety that we can't feel God and so we think that God is absent. "Why won't you do something?" we cry into the darkness. And in our distress, we don't notice that God IS doing something. God is waiting with us.

Sometimes the waiting overwhelms us with fear, anxiety, heartache, or boredom. And when we're overwhelmed with our own big feelings, it's hard to take comfort in God quietly waiting with us. God with us, offering grace and peace. God with us, enveloping us in love. When we can't feel God because all we can feel is our own big feelings, it's easy to think that God is absent. But God is never absent. God is there in the waiting and in everything else. No matter how difficult our waiting, the sun and moon rise and set, trees grow, hummingbirds sip nectar,

children play, babies are born, laundry is hung on the line, prayers are said and God is in all of that and everything else that goes on while we're waiting.

All those people we heard about this morning, knew God was present in the waiting and in everything else. I don't think that means that every moment of their lives was filled with thoughts of God, but I do think they knew themselves to somehow be in God, just as God was in them. Not just with God, but in God, inseparable and beloved. This is what it is to be faithful. To love and trust so deeply in God's abiding presence that we know we cannot be separated, whether or not we're paying attention, and no matter how we feel. This kind of trusting is the faith that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews was talking about. Faith is about knowing that we live and move and have our being in God, that we swim in God just as a fish swims in water. Faith is knowing God is with us regardless of how we feel.

God's presence does not require our ascent and thank goodness for that! Bidden or unbidden, acknowledged or ignored, God is present. That's what Jesus' resurrection means - that God is present in us and with us, no matter how we feel, whether or not we're paying attention. But when we do pay attention, when we watch carefully and wait with great expectation, we will see God all around us, and recognize our world as God's kingdom... a kingdom that has come, and still has a lot of coming left to do.

That's what the prophet Isaiah was talking about, you know.<sup>1</sup> Though his words were written all the way back in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, they ring true today. God's kingdom, which should have been evident in the temple, didn't seem so evident. Yes, there was incense and solemnity, prayers and even beautiful liturgy. But according to the prophet, God was sick and tired of all that. Did God despise the temple? Does God despise the church? Of course not. What the prophet was telling God's people then and God's people now is that God despises evil – whether it's the evil we do or the evil done on our behalf. And when we focus more on our worship and our rituals, what goes on inside these walls instead of actively working to stop the injustice and oppression and all manner of other evil going on beyond these walls, we are little more than hypocrites. Hypocrisy is, in fact, one of the main reasons people give for wanting nothing to do with organized religion. The critics say people in church talk about love and peace and justice, and they claim to believe in a God of all those things, but church people aren't doing anything to make the world better. They just go to church and pray to a God who doesn't do anything to make the world better either. Yikes!

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 1:1,10-20

But that isn't so and God isn't against the church. God is against evil, particularly injustice and oppression. The trouble comes when we forget that coming to church on Sunday to pray for justice and peace is an act of commitment TO justice and peace. When we walk out the church doors we must remember the connection between praying to God to heal the brokenness in our lives and in the world and knowing ourselves to be the instruments of that healing. We can't pray and wait. We must pray and act.

But wait, you say! You've just been telling us that we need to learn to wait! Well, yes. But there is waiting and there is waiting. There is waiting that is distracted, on our phones, stomping around, frustrated and full of feelings that overwhelm any possibility of attending to God. And then there is that other sort of waiting – intentionally waiting for inspiration from God's Holy Spirit, eagerly awaiting opportunities to be of service, to give generously, to take action against anything that is not of God. Silently waiting for God's still, small voice. Waiting and taking action are not incompatible, quite the contrary. They actually serve each other. Waiting is purposeful. Waiting allows us to deepen our attention, to know more surely that we live in the heart of God. Waiting helps us to hone our focus. It helps us to be ready.

Jesus said we should be dressed and ready for action, that we should watch and wait with great anticipation for the coming kingdom, because he doesn't want us to miss any one of the surprising ways God comes to us. When we watch and we wait, we begin to see that God's kingdom is always coming. *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*<sup>2</sup> God's love, so freely given, doesn't depend on us, it was God's idea. It's is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom that is the love of God. And as wonderful as that is, there's a cost to all that goodness.

To accept the gift of God's kingdom is to see the world more honestly, witnessing both the beauty AND the suffering in the world, and there is great cost in that. To accept the gift of God's kingdom likely means our lives must change, that we might need to rethink our life's purpose, that community will become more important than individuality, that what matters and what doesn't matter will change, and that we'll probably need to change the way we use money. To accept the gift of God's kingdom is to be faithful in a way that opens our eyes to the beauty of holiness and the beauty of living a holy life. To accept the gift of God's kingdom is to pay more attention to people than to things, to family than to work, to giving than taking. To accept the gift of God's kingdom is to follow Jesus and to treasure what God treasures. No wonder we need to be ready! There is good work to do as we watch and wait for God to show up in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:32

unexpected places of our lives, and God's promise always to be with us blesses our watching and our waiting.

Being with each other blesses the watching and the waiting too. Living in Christian community, sharing the stories of our lives, encouraging each other in our faith, holding sadness and joy and grief and delight with one another, praying together, coming to this table together are all wonderful ways of bringing God's kingdom more and more into the world. Deepening our connections with each other helps us to deepen our connections with God and with the whole wide world that longs for the kind of love we share here, in this place. *"Where your treasure is,"* Jesus said *"there will your heart be also."*<sup>3</sup>

The treasure that is God's kingdom comes among us each time we come to God, to each other and to the wider world with open and tender hearts, watching and waiting for what God desires for us. So let's make a little space in our lives this week, and maybe next week and maybe the week after that too... for waiting. Quiet waiting that lets us hear what the Spirit really is saying to us. Active waiting that seeks every single opportunity to be God's love in the world. Attentive waiting that steepens us in the God whose heart's desire is to give us every good thing. We are God's own treasure you know. And our work is to ensure that everyone we encounter knows herself, knows himself to be God's own treasure too. Amen.

---

<sup>3</sup> Luke 12:34