

Sermon 12/4/11

2 Peter 3:8-15a □□

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of person ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Gracious God, may the words I share today be spoken and heard in ways that are pleasing to you and that work toward your coming Reign. In the name of Christ, Amen.

This passage is certainly among the most often quoted from this particular book of the bible. People use the idea that a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day to God in a variety of ways. But pretty much this entire letter is instructions on how to wait constructively. When people are waiting for something they've been promised and it is taking longer to come than expected there are a variety of ways we can react. Only one of them, according to the epistle writer, is the correct way. There are a lot of different things we can do wrong. I'm sure you can think of a few you've done over the years. When I think about myself, one story of "bad waiting" stands out above all others.

I was 2 years old when the original Star Wars movie came out. Any conclusions you draw from the fact that I mention that piece of information are more than likely accurate. When I was a kid the time leading up to Christmases and birthdays I was always focused on some Star Wars toy or another. I was never a particularly patient kid. I don't know that I'm a particularly patient adult either. But there was one time, my 5th birthday, that I outdid myself. I forget the exact details of how I knew what I was getting, I imagine I only asked for one thing, but I was quite certain that I was getting a Millennium Falcon toy. I also somehow knew that it was stashed in the trunk of my parents' car. I was having a birthday party at the time of this story. I was surrounded by fun and friends but my sole focus was getting into that car.

I was also not always known for making good decisions as a kid. You see, I had the unfortunate tendency (honestly I still sort of do) of believing I knew how to do something just because I saw someone do it on television. I'm very glad we only had 5 channels when I was a kid because if I had access to the countless home improvement shows that are on TV now I probably would have torn down my parents' house trying to "flip" my bedroom. Anyway, on this particular day, the skill I believed I possessed because I had seen someone use it on television was the ability to pick locks. It seemed simple enough. I had seen countless cops and criminals pick all kinds of locks on a variety of different shows. I knew there was a credit card method but I didn't have a credit card and that worked on regular doors. I was trying to open a trunk. So all I needed was something small enough to fit in the key hole and then I would just wiggle it around until I heard the "pop" of the lock undoing and I would be putting decals on my Millennium Falcon toy in no time. The only question was what should I use to open the lock. There really aren't a wide variety of small, narrow objects available to a 5-year-old kid. So I went with the only thing that looked like it would fit, a toothpick.

I don't imagine it's too difficult to see where this story is heading. Me and my accomplice (who I should acknowledge didn't really believe I knew the first thing about picking a lock) ran to my parents' car, I stuck the toothpick in the trunk lock, and it immediately broke off and 1/2 of it got stuck in the door. I was overcome by 2 waves of panic. The first because I realized my parents would find out what I had done (as if they wouldn't have found out if I had succeeded and gotten my present before I was supposed to) and the second was because I was worried that now maybe they wouldn't be able to open the trunk and get my present anymore! I eventually got my present but it wasn't the "happy" birthday envisioned by either my parents or myself that morning.

In our epistle reading for today the author is telling his readers to be patient, to wait. But it's a very particular kind of patience. It's not a, "seriously, you can wait 5 more minutes, can't you?" kind of patience that's being described. It's a whole lot more than that. Like I said in our children's message for today, the people reading this letter are waiting for a particular event they believed would come in their lifetimes. They're wondering how much longer it's going to take. When is Christ coming back? When are things going to be set right? It has been so long already. How much longer?

To make matters worse, the author spends the majority of the letter telling them what is *bad* about waiting. Beginning in second chapter the author makes waiting sound like it's a trap. He writes about the human propensity turn away from Christ. He writes about people following false teachers. Given too much time to wait people lose their focus. Eventually they forget the promise or they stop believing it is ever going to come true and they return to being willing slaves to the very habits and behaviors they had been saved from through Christ. They return to their former lives. Their time as a follower of Jesus is just a small blip on their personal timelines and then it's over and it's like it never happened at all. Nothing has changed. It seems like everything would be fine if we just didn't have to wait so long. Why does God make us wait so long?

Then comes our reading for today. After all of the messages about what can go wrong when we are waiting comes the message of what can go right. We are to regard the Lord's patience as salvation. This isn't time given so that we can become discouraged, or lazy, or lose sight of the promise. This is time given so that we can continue to work toward getting things right. This is a time for everyone to repent. To repent is not saying we're sorry. To repent is literally to turn away from sin and idols and turn toward God. It is about living the life that God has planned for us.

Because it is when we lose sight of God and the real life that is promised to us, it is when we try to live by our own power that we return to what is familiar and not of Christ. We return to addictions and coping mechanisms that will get us through the next week, the next day, or even the next hour instead of letting Christ be our guide and our strength. We are told to do three things in this scripture: live lives of holiness and godliness, to work toward God's coming Reign, and to be found at peace. At first listen those things can seem to be opposed to one another. When I think of doing God's work or trying to lead a godly life I don't immediately think of myself at peace. I think of struggle, work, and often failure. But peace is precisely what we are promised as followers of Christ.

God knows that we are not particularly good at waiting. I mean, just patiently waiting for something to happen. That is not how we are wired. So we have work to do. That is how we maintain our focus. That is how we continue toward the promise of Christ's Reign. The problem is when we either refuse to do the work we are called to do or when we overstep our bounds and try to decide for ourselves where God is leading us and leading our world. Working for God does not mean working to bring about our vision of what God wants. It means listening for God in each moment, doing what is right, and letting what will happen, happen.

And when we do all that, when we let go of our own expectations and begin living for Christ, when we fill our time waiting with doing God's work we discover that we are not waiting at all. The life we had been waiting for is available right here and right now. The scriptures tell us repeatedly that followers of Christ have eternal life. It is not a promise in some distant future. It begins right away. When we discover that eternal life in ourselves we can live a life of holiness and godliness *and* be at peace. When we are focused on God, when we are doing our work, and when we let go of our expectations we will be found in peace at Christ's return.

Work brings us peace. We are meant to work. When we try to determine the outcome of that work, when we try to control what we cannot control, when we try to make things exactly how we want them, or even how we think God wants them, our lives are filled with stress, anxiety, and disappointment. We are to walk humbly with our God. Let go and let God is the saying. That is not permission to cease from living God's love in our world. It is a reminder of our place in things. It is a reminder to look around and discover what we already have instead of focusing on what we don't. When I was 5 I was at my own birthday party but I couldn't even have fun because I was waiting for what I thought was coming next. I was so focused on it I tried to make it happen on my

own schedule instead of just letting things play out. As a result, I caused myself a lot of unnecessary grief on what should have been an entirely happy day. When we become too focused on what's coming next from God we can miss out on that piece of eternal life that we already have right now. Our impatience is less a indication of our desire for what God has promised us and more a sign that we want things our own way.

The author of this epistle is talking about faith. Faith is experiencing God in the here and now. Faith is knowing through that experience that God loves you and accepts you as God's own. And faith is allowing that experience to be your strength and your guide as you live into the life God has planned for you. In this season of waiting, may we all be blessed with abundant faith. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious and loving God, hear our prayers today. Be here. Fill us with your Spirit. Let us experience your presence here among us, celebrating with us, comforting us, strengthening us, and sustaining us. Patient Lord as we continue in this season of remembering those who waited for the Christ to come and as we focus on our own wait for Christ to come again we ask that you live through us. Help us live the lives you wish for each of us. Guide us to do the work we are each called to do. Let your light shine through the members of this community so that everyone we encounter will know your love and your acceptance.

God of Peace, we ask that you come to our broken world. Help us to come together. Be with leaders of all kinds. Help us to stop focusing on doing everything ourselves and instead help us to rely on you. Put an end to war, to poverty, and to oppression. Help us all to see our shared humanity and work for the good of all people, not just the ones we know personally. Help us to see you in the face of everyone we see.

God of celebrations we thank you for this new chapter that is beginning today in the life of this church. We ask that this is a blessing for everyone. We pray also because our hearts are filled with joy:

God of healing, we continue to pray for Muriel Lamppert, Bette Eberhard, Dorothy Hurd, Dick Page, Chrissy Schaefer and the Fudella Family. This week we add Anneliese Long and Carol Malz to our prayers. We pray also for:

And hear us now as we silently lift up those prayers on our hearts that have not been shared...We pray all of this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray: