

December 6, 2020  
Rev. Kerry Smith

2 Peter 3:8-18  
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Advent Between Two Worlds: Waiting

2 Peter 3:8-18

Inclusive Bible

This point must not be overlooked, dear friends: in the eyes of the Most High, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. God does not delay in keeping the promise, as some mean “delay.” Rather, God shows you generous patience, desiring that no one perish but that all come to repentance. The day of our God will come like a thief, and on that day the heavens will vanish with a roar; the elements will catch fire and fall apart, and the earth and all its works will be destroyed in the flames.

Since everything is to be destroyed in this way, what holy and devoted lives you should lead! Look for the coming of the Day of God, and try to hasten it along. Because of it, the heavens will be destroyed in flames and the elements will melt away in a blaze. But what we await are new heaven and a new earth where, according to the promise, God’s justice will reside.

So, beloved, while waiting for this, make every effort to be found at peace and without stain or defilement in God’s sight. Consider our God’s patience as your opportunity for salvation.

Our dear brother Paul also wrote you about this, according to the wisdom he had been given. Paul writes this way and speaks of these issues in all of his letters – though he does, admittedly, write some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unbalanced people distort to their own undoing, as they do the other scriptures. But be forewarned, beloved sisters and brothers: do not be carried away by the errors of unprincipled people and thus forfeit the security you enjoy. Instead, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Sovereign and Savior Jesus Christ, who is glorified now and for all eternity. Amen.

We are in the church season of Advent as we count down to Christmas. Advent comes from the Latin word *Adventus* and means coming as we wait for the coming of Christ. Advent is all about waiting. I’m not good at waiting. We just finished the latest season of the Great British Baking Show and having to wait an entire week for the next episode was torture! I want to be able to watch all of the TV show series, not have to wait an entire seven days for the next episode. This year’s Advent time is even more about waiting. We usually have to wait in the line to take pictures with Santa and we have to wait for Christmas morning to open our presents. But this year we have to wait for a vaccine. We have to wait for a trip or a vacation. We have to wait to hug our relatives and friends.

As Christians we are waiting for the world to be how God wants it to be. We live between two worlds, the world as it is and the world how God wants it to be. We talked last week about using this Advent season to work to improve our world, consciously working to make our world the way God wants it to be. The day before Thanksgiving Rosie Curts was block-walking for the upcoming Dallas ISD school board run-off election. Rosie was walking door to door because she believes that voting is important and she wants to make our world better by encouraging others to vote. Unfortunately, at one house where she knocked, a mastiff dog ran past its owner and attached its teeth to Rosie’s wrist. I’m so thankful for Rosie’s passion and also thankful that Rosie only required stitches, not surgery.

We are called to cooperate with all that God is seeking to do in this world so that it can be restored and healed. That means that we give money to build water wells around the world. That means that we support nonprofits that promote literacy and education in our city and around the world. We support food pantries that feed the hungry in our city. We are called to wait actively, not passively. We don’t twiddle our thumbs; we never stop trying to do the next right thing.

The scripture passage that we read helps me remember that the waiting of Advent is not a made up thing. Waiting, time, and patience have always been a part of the Christian life. It is nothing new. Elton John has an old song called “If There’s a God in Heaven what’s God Waiting For?” He sings about everything that is still wrong with the world with a sense of really? Mothers going hungry to feed their children, people more interested in profit instead of people,

poverty, and war. We wonder “If There’s a God in Heaven what’s God Waiting For?” 2 Peter tells us that God is waiting because God is not wanting anyone to be lost. “God shows you generous patience, desiring that no one perish but that all come to repentance.” That is a word of grace. God is saying I’m going to hold out for you because what I have for you is good.

I want God to make everything wonderful quickly and I often think God is moving too slowly. We may think that God is slow, but God’s timing of slowness is God’s gift of grace in our own lack of belief.<sup>1</sup> God has patience with me when I’m being reluctant or hesitant to trust God or to give myself over to God. These words from 2 Peter were probably one of the last of the New Testament to be written. The author was very concerned about people who were leaving the church because Christ hadn’t come back yet. The author is reminding people to trust God.

I can identify with the author of this letter because they are trying to correct expectations about timing. I know I am not alone in wondering when are we going to worship in person again!? The author of this letter is trying to correct expectations and help people deal with a delay and a frustration that they didn’t see coming. As I heard the news about vaccines, I wondered when we will be able to see and hug friends and family again? In November we were blessed to have two weddings in this sanctuary. Donna Aldridge and Keli Ward and Konner and Christine Kirkpatrick. They both were wonderful but it was also weird because there were people in the sanctuary that weren’t just Robert, Kristi, Chris, and myself as we film worship. As Robert played music before Konner and Christine’s wedding, I started to get a little emotional because people were in this place and it made me miss all of you so much.

The author of 2 Peter wants to help people deal with delay and frustration that they didn’t see coming, and through it all the author wants people to know that God is still faithful. Our expectations of where God is in this moment have to change. We are going to have to make some adjustments. Writer Anne Lamott in her book *Plan B* talks about expectations. She talks about how things fall so short of our expectations, how our hearts get broken and our kids do scary things and our animals run away. She wonders why life isn’t more like it is in the movies, why things don’t come out neatly and why can’t lessons be learned when you’re in the mood for learning them. She says expectations are resentments under construction. She says that one of the secrets in life is to keep expectations low.

During these days of waiting, we have expectations that God will show up because God is faithful. I see God showing up in the pictures of beautiful trees that Stephen and Sherry Houpt post on social media from their neighborhood walks. I see God showing up in the teachers and school administrators who teach because they love children and want to help them learn. I see God showing up in the parents who wash all the dishes and all the clothes and pray with their children before dinner and at bedtime teaching them that God loves them and that they are a blessing. I see God showing up in the healthcare workers who are exhausted but show up day after day after day.

The words from scripture remind us that we aren’t the first faithful people to ask how long, Lord. As we wait, we are called to be like a lamp shining in dark places, giving light until the dawn comes. Shining in the darkness of this world, our lamp points to the coming light of Christ. I think of Emma Qualia, one of our youth, who makes sandwiches for the hungry, I think of so many from Greenland Hills who have contributed money and gone to Juarez to build houses for low-income families, I think of our Preschool and children’s ministry that has donated birthday supplies for the Birthday Project who hosts birthday parties for children who have no parties. There are all lamps shining in dark places. We are called to active waiting.

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<sup>1</sup> Working preacher podcast: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/757-second-sunday-of-advent-dec-6-2020>

Have you heard the story of the spoons?<sup>2</sup> A man walks into a packed dining hall that is filled with delicious food, but everyone is miserable and starving. The spoons they're required to use are so long they can't bring the food to their mouths. This is hell, the man is told. He is then ushered to another dining room, where the same setup awaits him, but this time the people are happy and smiling. They are feeding one another with the long handled spoons. This is heaven. The difference between heaven and hell is taking care of each other. We miss each other right now, but there are neighbors helping neighbors, people finding ways to show others they care. Don't give up hope. We are in this together. Christ, God with us, is coming. Thanks be to God, Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/david-kessler-and-brene-on-grief-and-finding-meaning/>