

“Good things come to those who wait,” someone said - and so I styled myself ‘King of the procrastinators.’ Delay was my delight. And the question I became most familiar with - asked by mentors, colleagues and friends- is “What are you waiting for?”

The foot dragging that I did prior to my return to school was legendary. Lea and I recognized - early on in the discernment - that it was like being on a teeter-totter; when one of us was full of enthusiasm, the other would be full of caution and questions. It took a long time to balance that ride. And then someone would ask; ‘What are you waiting for?’

Waiting for support - for encouragement - for someone to ‘pick me up and put me in the pool.’ I was content to wait, sure that ‘in time, all will be revealed...’ and it was...sort of.

Waiting seems to tie our Scriptures together this morning. John, in exile on Patmos, waits for the world to be changed by the Grace of God. John writes in a kind of code that is meant to convey hope to Christians living with the harsh realities of an oppressive regime and a seemingly endless series of disasters. Too many in the Church have turned John’s powerful message of hope into what they would call ‘prophecy,’ (following the mantra - God’s things come to those who wait...) but John was not predicting anything - he and his fellow Christians were living it. His ‘revelation’ was offered to remind us that even when we must wait, we wait on the One whose love and mercy changes everything.

A city of gold - crystal fountains, pearly gates - an image of a promise in which none need be afraid...sealed with the promise offered in chapter 21.

A place, not divided into ‘work and worship,’ but where to exist is to honour God - no temple, no sanctuary is necessary - the whole place is ‘sanctuary’; the air, the rocks, the streets, the trees. A Place where ‘nothing unclean’ is found. Not an exclusive resort for the faithful, not like that; but a place where the good is so obvious, so palpable, that evil cannot exist. This is what John and his audience are waiting for.

But you might well ask, if the visions of God's peaceful reign are so appealing, why wait? Why not work for what you long for? Why not follow in the footsteps of Jesus - in the manner of Micah - and 'do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God until peace and justice and love are the order of the day.

John and his generation spoke longingly of waiting, because acting - living out the promise of this beautiful vision of God's reality - could get you arrested (as in John's case) or, in some cases, killed. When the promise of God's order threatens to undo the power gained by force, or by politics, or by cruelty and stealth, then those who embody God's order (think Jesus, Peter, Paul and the rest) must be forcibly denied, resisted or defeated. You wait because you trust God - because the vision of that peaceful reign of God can sustain you in the absence of peace.

The waiting, for John, was necessary. Just as the man by the pool.- constrained by his illness; limited by his infirmity - must wait for someone to put him in the waters. He cannot take action for himself, and in an 'everyone for themselves' situation (first one in has the best chance of a cure) no one is likely to offer a helping hand. This fellow has no chance to help himself - to bring justice or healing or anything like relief to himself. The waiting (38 years of it) is not easy, but what choice did he have?

Two very different 'waiting' stories then - and we read them and think 'look at what God has promised to those who wait!' 'Look at what Jesus can do!'

But what are WE waiting for?

Do we wait for Jesus to return - to wander by in our moment of need and remind us that the power to 'stand up and walk' has always been within us (Jesus only speaks - no other action. He hears the man's story, and says 'get up and walk.')

Are we waiting in dread for 'the end' so that the new thing that God has promised will sooth our battered souls?

Waiting in this day and age is a tempting thing. But we are called to do more than wait - and our lives (in this part of the world, at least) are not forfeit if we choose to work for justice and offer mercy and try to live God's promises into reality.

Standing up for the oppressed and speaking out against the kind of violent rhetoric that threatens to consume us is the least we can do as followers of Jesus - and the world cannot wait for us to act. More die every day - victims of selfish, fearful and power-mad people. We can say (and some in the church DO say) 'we must wait, for these are the signs of the end...' But John wasn't predicting this - John was living a version of it in his own time. The 'waiting' he did - his imprisonment - wasn't idle time. He wrote (in code) to the church at large to remind them what the promise was - what the future could be. God has promised it and we must discover it rather than wait for it.

There's nothing wrong with waiting. Anticipation is a wonderful state of being. And my impulse to wait and see is called, in some quarters, thoughtful deliberation. But eventually, I had to act. Waiting and wishing failed to make any change in my situation. They don't confer degrees in procrastination...

And I learned - eventually - the lesson that the man at the pool learned. That waiting can sometime silence the voice of the spirit's leading. The chance to 'get up and walk,' the chance to reach for justice and live in love - these are always open to us. The kingdom of God comes closer when we step out in faith after Jesus. The 'good things' I so patiently waited on were waiting in me to be activated - waiting for me to put myself in the Spirit's path.

Waiting, it seems, goes both ways.

We wait on God in faith and hope - God waits on us in patient love. Yet even now, the waters are stirred. Even now, the light shines fiercely against the darkness. Even now, God's promise invites us to live - to share - to act.

What are we waiting for?