

Waiting... in Patience

2 Peter 3:8-15a

One of my favorite TV shows as a child, and one that has become a favorite for my children, is Mr. Rogers's neighborhood. Mr. Rogers is masterful helping children, and adults, address complex emotions in simple ways, and he often does it through a song. One of his songs is, "It's Very, Very, Very Hard to Wait." It goes like this...

I think it's very, very, hard to wait...

Especially when you're waiting

for something really nice.

I think it's very, very, very hard to wait.

It's hard to wait, isn't it? This morning I'm beginning a series of sermons on Waiting, to go along with our time in Advent as we prepare for Christmas. Advent is the season in the weeks just before Christmas, and it means coming or arrival. We are preparing to celebrate Christmas, the arrival of Jesus in Bethlehem, and the birth of the son of God over 2000 years ago. We are also preparing for the second arrival of Jesus, the Second Coming, when God will finally and completely put the world in order – a new heaven and a new earth. The season of Advent is mostly about this second arrival, or second coming of Christ.

When will Christ arrive? In some sense, all of us hope now. In some sense of another, we're looking for Christ to show up in our lives. We're anticipating that God will be present to us, in our joy and in our struggle, in our day-to-day existence. Especially at this time of year, as we decorate the tree and hang the lights and wrap the gifts; as we double-check with family and friends, arrange parties and dinners; as we crank up the Christmas music, and belt out Jingle Bells, and Angels We Have Heard on High, and Silent Night. Through it all, underneath it all, we're hoping that God will show up. We're hoping... and *waiting*.

The flip side of Advent is *waiting*; if Christ is coming, if Christ is coming again, if Christ is coming into our lives, we're *waiting* for Christ to come. As Fred Rogers wrote, it's hard to wait when you're waiting for something really nice. When you're waiting for a party, or a trip; when you're waiting for a special event, a birthday or graduation; when you're waiting for a door to open; when you're waiting for a dream to come true; when you're waiting for new chapter in life that offers new possibilities; when you're waiting for justice to be served; when you're waiting for peace to reign.

I think it's very, very, very hard to wait.

Of course, it's also hard to wait for things that are not so nice. You've gotten the test results from the doctor, and now you're waiting for the treatments to begin. One week, two weeks, and three weeks before they start. Or you've made a decision that you know had to be made, but it's going to hurt, and now you have to break the news. When do you do it? There's a pit in your stomach while you're waiting. Or you're hoping and praying for a person that you love to be well, to get well, to live well, but you know that it's out of your control. You can't make it happen, so you just have to *wait*.

I think it's very, very, very hard to wait.

The letter of 2nd Peter teaches us something about waiting with faith. There are many different ways to wait, and there are lots of things to do while you're waiting. Yet all of us hope that we can wait with faith, we can wait with inner peace, and with a calm assurance; that we can wait without churning anxiety, but with deep trust. The writer of 2nd Peter is trying to lead us into that kind of faithful waiting. The people this letter is addressed worried concerned that Christ had not yet returned, and worried that perhaps their faith was in vain. Perhaps they should just give it all up and move on! *Quit waiting.*

In verse 8 of chapter 3, the writers says, *"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."* God does not count time the way we count time. From our perspective, especially when we are waiting, the minutes and the hours drag by slowly, days feel like weeks, and weeks feel like months. But from God's perspective, our days and weeks are like the blink of an eye. God's perspective is cosmic, and the cosmos teaches us something about time. The light we see from the stars on a clear winter night did not shine last night, or last year, or even in the last century. The light shining on a winter night emanated from that star billions of years ago. And it just arrived. With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. God counts time differently.

In verse 9, the writer says, *"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."* God is not slow, God is patient. Slowness is hard to understand with God. The dictionary definition is, "not able to move quickly." If God is not able to move quickly, then indeed God has a problem. If anyone should be able to move quickly, it's God! No, God is not slow. Another definition is lacking in promptness or willingness. Is God lacking in willingness to be invest and involved in our lives, to be with us? Of course not! The very name of Christ is Emmanuel – God with us. Another definition of slowness is lacking in interest. Is God uninterested? Surely not! The God who gave his only son is not now uninterested in our lives. God is not slow, *God is patient.* This is what patience looks like with God. God is willing to wait through difficult time for the right moment. God is patient. God is not impulsive, or hasty, but calmly works all things toward his purpose and plan. God is patient. God perseveres, God is unwavering in his purpose to redeem a broken world, and to save hurting people; nothing distracts God from this purpose, for God is infinitely patient.

Why is God so patient? Because God is pure love. God does not want any to perish, but all to come to repentance. To put that another way, God wants all to come closer to him in faith. God wants all to grow more and more into the image of his Son. This is not something that God can simply make happen because God has decided to work with us, with people, with free will and circumstance. God draws us, and nudges us, and *waits for us.* God waits and waits and waits. Because God's project is large, it is cosmic, it is bigger than anything we can imagine, it is greater than all we can conceive, God waits. God's project is the redemption of the whole creation, the salvation of the whole world. So God waits, and waits, patiently, and lovingly.

Finally, the writer of this letter says, "Regard the patience of our Lord as salvation." This is change in perspective that is life-giving, and hopeful and deeply faithful. When we are waiting for God, it is a kind of waiting that brings healing and wholeness. It is the like the waiting for a wound to heal; it is salve, it is salvation. While we are waiting, God is working within us, drawing us closer to himself. God is working on circumstances in ways that we cannot see and know. God is dealing with other people in ways we

cannot imagine. God is patiently and purposely working – for our healing. The patience of the Lord is your salvation. So we wait.

Some of us, when we have to wait, like to eat. So here, we come to this Communion Feast. As we gather around the table, we are assured of God's perfect love, of God's boundless patience, and of God's firm promise. The waiting will end, Christ will come again, and we will arrive in the eternal presence of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.