

11/28/2021
The Rev. Kate Byrd

Waiting Well

I may be one of the world's most impatient persons. From the time I was a small child, and (regrettably) up until today I continue to be horrifically bad at waiting for pretty much anything and everything. As an adolescent I would become so worked up with anticipation and excitement around holidays and birthdays that I would inevitably make myself sick. And, while it has been a couple of decades since I experienced a Christmas confined to my bed with a fever over 101, I still have to find ways to curb my impatient tendencies. If I know I will have to wait (say for an appointment or in transit) I am sure to have a good book to read or a knitting project ready to go in my purse. And if it involves having to wait to share, say, some good news, a Christmas gift with a loved one, or even a good joke, forget it. If there is something joyous to celebrate or share or enjoy with others my impatience will more than likely get the better of me. So, needless to say I am terrible at waiting.

Thankfully I am not sure I'm the only one. I mean, just go to Costco or Walmart after Halloween, and you can be certain to find a flurry of Holiday decor and accoutrements haphazardly rummaged through. As we scurry to trim our trees, deck our halls, and get our Jolly on, all before we have even roasted our Thanksgiving turkey! Running from one holiday parade, to the next Christmas party. Watching those little (or in my family's case ginormous) brown amazon boxes pile up on our front porches, as we make our lists and check them twice. In the midst of all our holiday cheer, still stuffed from Thanksgiving super, and running on full speed all the way into 2022 we are called to "stand up and raise [our] heads, because [our] redemption is drawing near."

During this season of Advent, we are invited to step outside the hustle and bustle. To take a moment and remember our call, as Christians. Not only to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but also our hope in the return of Christ. This is an invitation to learn what it means to wait well. Which, if you are anything like me, is a difficult if not, sometimes, unbearable task. Because it calls us to be present to the discomfort of the unknown, unpredictable, and uncontrollable fate of the future.

As Jesus tells us, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near." While much of our passage from Luke today feels ominous if not downright terrifying, as we hear, "People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Even as we are entering into the most wonderful time of year, this season marked by glad tidings of comfort and joy. I think this might be just the thing we need to hear. Because it reminds us of the hope we are called to have, and the hope we are called to bring into the world. As we remember the signs we have seen, and see every day. Signs we may have identified today as pandemic, global warming, political division, economic and racial disparities, so on and so forth, that call us to pay attention. But we get to choose how we respond, as Jesus says, "be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation, and drunkenness and the worries of this life."

Our season of Advent is a reminder that our redemption is taking place. We have witnessed the birth of the messiah into our world. And yet, we are still awaiting the reign of Christ to take hold. In this way we

are being called to wait, not only patiently, but more so with expectation for that final arrival of the kingdom. And, in this way we are being invited to participate as it continues to be birthed, just as it was over 2,000 years ago to an unwed teenage girl at a stable in Bethlehem.

Waiting is hard, uncomfortable, sometimes downright unpleasant. We have all experienced that over the past two years. As we have awaited the end of this seemingly endless pandemic. Or relief from overwhelming division within our country. Or even, resolve to the climate warming crisis that is now at hand. As Jesus calls us to be on guard, to stand up and raise our heads, he calls us to remain hopeful in the kingdom that is coming, which he names as “our redemption.” In this way we are being encouraged, not to count down the days. To live in fear. Or, even to deny the ways in which we may see the end coming. But, instead to pay attention to the ways we see the kingdom breaking in, maybe even participating. So that we do not find “that day [to] catch (us) unexpectedly, like a trap.”

As a child, regrettably making myself sick with anticipation over the impending holiday festivities I would inevitably arrive at the long awaited day largely let down and disappointed. Stuck in my bed, unable to enjoy the fellowship of company, unwrapping of gifts, piles of food, or holiday cheer after having wound myself up and overtaxed my body. Finding that the joy of my long awaited day was no longer available to me. And, while that same holiday excitement may have gotten the better of me as a child. This is not to say that I no longer hold that same childlike anticipation. Don’t get me wrong. I will most certainly be decking my halls and trimming my tree. Most likely beginning this afternoon as I bring home my fresh from the transfer truck St. Paul’s tree (thanks to our brotherhood of St. Andrews). And, you can be certain to hear Christmas tunes ringing throughout my home from now (or more like yesterday) through Epiphany. At the same time, though, I hope to participate in our Advent call to lean into the spiritual discipline of waiting well.

Because, our invitation to wait well is an invitation to be changed. Changed by all the ways we can find hope in God’s promise of redemption. This hope in the long awaited redemption that was born into a lowly stable over 2,000 years ago. This hope in the everyday redemption that is taking place in ordinary spaces at every moment (like here at St. Paul’s). This hope in the approaching redemption that we are still awaiting in that kingdom to come. This is God’s work of redemption, that was, and is, and is to come. If we stop and raise our heads from the whirlwind of our lives (or just this holiday season) we can even glimpse it or better yet participate in it. Redemption, being those actions that reorient ourselves towards God and God’s hope for our world, can be as simple as reaching out to a fellow brother or sister in need. By filling our blessing box or shopping for an Angel on our tree. It can be as easy as picking up the phone to reach out to a friend or family member whom you have lost touch with, or maybe even been estranged from, to share a word of love. It can be as small as assessing ways your home might cut down on energy and water use. It can even be as slight as setting aside a few minutes to be present to God’s Word and presence in our lives. It is in all these ways that we can lean into the unease of the unexpected and the uncertainty of the unknown, actively choosing to hold on to hope. Hope in God’s redemption, that was and is and is to come. Allowing ourselves, possibly others, maybe even the world, to be changed as we not await the arrival of the kingdom of God but share in the work of ushering it in today as well.