
Waiting for God

I often tell people patience is a virtue, and I don't have any. Patience that is, not virtues. I, like many of us here today, I am not one who likes to wait. True to my type A personality, waiting feels like a waste of time. Time that I feel could be used for more productive things. But let's be honest, waiting is a large part of our relationship with God. It seems with God, nothing happens when we think it should. In this morning's Psalm, the Psalmist emphasized the need for patience when he wrote, "My soul waits for the Lord, more patiently than the watchmen for the morning, more patiently than the watchmen for the morning." Everything takes time with God. As I have heard many times from older family and friends, "Everything happens in God's time." Even God's promises to Israel. The challenge we are often faced with, is for the endurance to remain hopeful as we wait for God to fulfill God's promises. In today's reading from Ezekiel, we heard the well know vision of the prophet at the Valley of Dry Bones.

It came at a time when all hope had been lost for Israel. Years earlier, the great kingdom of Kings David and Solomon had fallen to foreign hands. The best and the brightest of the Israelites had been dispersed throughout the Babylonian Empire. Decades had passed, and to the untrained eye, it appeared as if the restoration of Israel was all but a hopeless dream.

As Ezekiel surveys the Valley of Dry Bones, all he can see for miles around are the dried, dusty remains of what were the children of Israel. From this vantage point all looked lost, how could God bring life back to something that had been dead for so long. But with God, all things are possible, even bringing back life to where no life remains. For those who remained part of the Babylonian Diaspora the prophet's message was clear, do not lose hope, remain steadfast to God and wait patiently, "more patiently than the watchmen for the morning," for God still can and will restore Israel to its former glory. Be assured, God keeps God's promises. And God did . . .but it took seventy years. . .three and a half generations before the Kingdom of Israel was restored. Not many of us have the patience and the perseverance to wait that long for God. It seems part of the human condition is to live in the short term. . .to demand instant results. If, what we have seen and read through the media is true, our recovery from the great recession, as we are now referring to the economic difficulties of the past decade, did not happen fast enough for most members of society.

Despite the depth of the economic ruin that led us into this great recession, most expected recovery to happen within a year, two years at best. And for those without work, I am sure, most felt like the Israelites of the diaspora, losing hope, as their impatience and fears grew, wondering if they would ever find work again. Where was God in all of this, had God abandoned the unemployed, the homeless and the poor? For those without jobs, one month, one week,

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even one day is too long to wait as unemployment and savings begin to run out. Will God provide before it is too late?

Only those who have lived a long life can answer with assurance as they have the advantage of time to look over the crises and hardships of the past and see in hindsight God's care and promises fulfilled. Even in the Swan house, there have been times of darkness and despair as we wondered if God was truly present or had forgotten us. As many know, our daughter Chelsea she has worked to pursue her dream to be an opera singer. Her journey has been long and bumpy. When she was one year out of college, all seemed lost when three out of three graduate programs she had applied to denied her auditions for their program.

According to Chelsea's coaches, she had the gifts and talent to pursue the next step, but as door after door was shut in her face, her dream felt hopeless. It was hard not to give up, to trust that her time was not yet. Another year of waiting and not knowing felt like an eternity, but true to what her coaches had predicted, another year of training and maturation made all the difference as doors that were once closed to her were opened. All she had to do, in the darkest of moments, is what is most difficult, to trust and wait patiently for God, "as patiently as the watchmen waits for the morning." Over the course of history, Israel has not only watched and waited for restoration from Babylon, in fact, Israel has had a history of watching and waiting. With Israel's second and final fall, they again found themselves watching and waiting on God. Waiting for the messiah, the anointed one to come. Mary, Joseph and Elizabeth all watched and waited patiently for the messiah to arrive and rejoiced when Jesus was heralded as the anointed one of God by the angel Gabriel. And we too, join with the centuries of the saints of God watching and waiting for the arrival of the Kingdom.

How different are we from Martha and Mary? As they grieved the death of Lazarus and wished the Kingdom had already arrived where sorrow and death will be no more. Like you and me, they too hoped and prayed that Jesus would arrive before their brother died in hopes that he would be healed. As each day went by, their hope waned. And yet they waited patiently for Jesus. When Jesus did arrive, all hope was lost. Lazarus was already dead. In fact, he was four days dead with the stench of death permeating his tomb. There was now no hope for a miracle, death had won, Lazarus would truly be no more. At least that's what it seemed, except with God, not only are all things possible, but all things fall under God's command, even the grip of death itself.

The Psalmist tells us how his "soul waits upon the Lord, more patiently than the watchmen before the morning, more patiently than the watchmen before the morning." His words serve to remind us that the greater part of our journeys with God are about patient waiting. And how God will fulfill God's promises, but in God's time, not ours. God will fulfill God's dreams for us, but on God's schedule not ours. Our work is to wait with hope and confidence, knowing that in

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time, all will be fulfilled.

So on this fifth Sunday in Lent, we find ourselves being asked to wait, to wait with Mary and Martha, by the tomb of Lazarus, to wait and watch with the disciples and Mary as Jesus is tried and killed. To wait with Mary and the Apostle's by the tomb in anticipation of the Resurrection. And finally, to wait together for the Reign that has yet to come. "My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning."

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