

While We Wait

Rev. Jeanne Santucci Murawski

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I admit it. I hate to wait. I like things to happen quickly. I walk fast. I tend to talk fast, too. Long lines make me anxious. Don't get me started on the DMV.

But I'd like to argue that partly, I'm just a product of my time and culture.

As a people, it seems we as a whole have no patience. We expect everything to happen quickly. Immediately.

Just think back to the moments you've (surely) had at sometime this week, when your Internet connection started to get a little slow. When your iPhone had a hard time catching a signal. When you sent an email 20 minutes ago, and the other person hasn't replied back yet.*

Frustrating, right?

We live in a day and age where information is readily available, conversation is constant, the noise and pace of life are relentless and non-stop. We all hate to wait. We want to know what's happening now, next, and then what after that.

So it is that we might be able to step into the sandals of the Israelites in today's Old Testament reading, and find they fit just a little too well.

Moses has gone up the mountain to talk with God, and it seems like he's been gone for-ev-er. Forty days and forty nights, the text tells us, which is the biblical way of saying...for-ev-er.

And while Moses is up there receiving the 10 commandments, along with some painfully detailed directions about worship, the people on the ground have no idea what's going on. They begin to wonder if he's ever coming back.

They're done waiting. And they ask Aaron, Moses' second-in-command, what they should do.

Now. What exactly it is that they do seems to be a matter of translation. What this golden calf is, and what it does or does not represent seems to depend on how you read the Hebrew.

But long story short, the people have become tired of waiting and haven taken matters into their own hands.

Have you ever been in that kind of situation? Where it would have been better to wait something out, but you forged ahead anyway?

God knows I have.

Like I said, patience isn't my strong suit.

Yet, at the same time, I know that there are times when waiting is what is required. And there are time when waiting will bring even greater rewards.

The writer Rick Morely puts it this way.

"There is great spiritual treasure to be found in waiting—the practice of cultivating patience. It's a practice that raises faith to a profound trust that God is working and moving, even when things seem to be going nowhere. And that God's good time is the right time. That glaciers move, even against all appearances to the contrary."

He continues, "It's a practice which forces us to put our own needs to the side for a bit, and focus on seeing the world and the unfolding of God's plan and revelation as God sees fit to unfold it."

"It can be frustrating," Morely says, "but, it can also be beautiful."

Behind my desk here in the church office, I keep a bulletin board of inspirations, quotations, and questions. Front and center is a card painted in shades of blue that reads simply...all in good time.

It's true, waiting can be beautiful. The sweet anticipation of a seasonal tradition. The nine months of growth and nurture that bring new life to bear. The turn of the years. The transition time before something new starts in your life.

Everything that needs to happen will happen all in good time.

But what do we do in the meantime?

Perhaps an answer can be found in today's reading from Philippians, one that, I might add, has also spent a good amount of time on my bulletin board..

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, repice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Trust. Let go. Pray.

Believe me, I am not one to advocate a docile, unthinking quietism, and that is not what Paul is suggesting to the Philippians, either.

Rejoice, he tells them, God is with you. Take in your surroundings. Know that you are not alone.

Stop worrying. Start praying. Let peace enter your heart, and through you, let peace enter your world. God's peace will lead you, God's peace will guide you.

So often, we think that everything is in our hands, that the weight of the world is ours to bear.

We set up our false idols of self-sufficiency, of hard work and nose-to-the-grindstone pushing, forgetting that God, our true God, holds us in loving arms, assuring us that our lives have a meaning, and that God will call us to it, all in good time.

So what do we do in the meantime? What do we do while we wait?

Paul is frustratingly general, when he writes,

Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Thanks, Paul.

But at the same time, thanks, Paul. Thanks for the reminder that we already know. If we study together and tell the stories of God and Christ Jesus, if we look at the scriptures and listen to the Spirit, we already know what it is we are called to do. The prophets tell us, the gospels show us, each page of this family album of faith points us to love, and justice, peace and truth.

We do these things while we wait.

Jill Y Crainshaw writes, speaking of this span of the church year called ordinary time,

"Seasons of identity exploration and maturing hold the potential to remind communities of the profound extraordinariness of what seems merely ordinary. Keep on with your everyday works of gentleness and prayerful living, Paul counsels the Philippians,

"Bake a loaf of bread for the woman down the street whose husband just died, Paul might say to contemporary believers. Take a bag of groceries to the food closet. Visit a church member in the nursing home. Seemingly ordinary acts bear extraordinary gifts of God's love."

She's right. Whatever it is that causes your heart to leap with joy inside of you, chances are, that's what you need to be doing in your times of waiting.

Perhaps you are waiting on a new career path to come to light. A child's rough patch to pass on by. A family situation to change, for better or worse.

Maybe you are waiting for clarity on your next move, or the consequences of your last move to come to light.

Whatever it is that you are waiting for. Whatever it is that you wait on, know dear friends, that what you wait on is the Lord. That God will show you the way in good time. And while you wait, rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you. While you wait, continue your ordinary and extraordinary acts, led by prayer and thanksgiving in all things.

Amen.

*this paragraph – Rick Morely