

Advent 2, Year C
December 9, 2018
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Advent is a season dedicated to the spiritual practice of waiting. We all have experience with the inevitability of waiting that is part of our daily lives, whether we are in line at a store; anticipating responses to our emails, texts, and phone calls; crossing our fingers that interviews or test results bring good news; or anticipating a special day on the calendar. Waiting as a spiritual practice, however, moves beyond sheer necessity and into an active cultivation of hope, trust, and attentiveness. It is a practice of intentionality, one in which we choose again and again to return our focus to God, to put our ultimate trust in God, and to pay attention to the ways in which we may see God at work in and among us.

As humans our perspective is framed by *chronos*, which is chronological time. We measure time by minutes, days, hours, weeks, months, and years. Yet there is another kind of time called *kairos*, which is the right time, the opportune time. Our frustration with waiting often arises because chronological time slips by while we wait for the right time, which is God's time. God is like the Queen in the movie *The Princess Diaries*, who said, **“A queen is never late. Everyone else is simply early.”**

The Bible shows us over and over that God's promises are made and fulfilled in God's time, which can be quite a long time. This truth can create a challenge for us, as we wait and watch for the fulfillment of promises and see no discernible sign of progress.

Today we hear the fulfillment of one set of promises and the anticipation of another. Last week, when we heard the Angel Gabriel tell Mary the mother of Jesus that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived in her old age and would bear a son, we learned that the right time is sometimes quite surprising. Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband and a priest of God, was so stunned when an angel appeared to tell him the good news of their son, that he questioned how it could be true. In response the angel made Zechariah mute, a remarkable turn of events in a Gospel that then showcases the two women sharing a song of celebration in the *Magnificat*. Once Elizabeth's son is born and Zechariah agrees to name him John, his voice is restored and he offers his song of praise, which we read together this morning. In *The Song of Zechariah* we hear that God has fulfilled the promise made to the prophets of old, that God would raise up a savior from the house of David. As Zechariah holds his son John, he declares John's purpose:

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, To give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.

Thus we have the perfect introduction to John the Baptist beginning his ministry in the Gospel of Luke. John is clearly identified as the son of Zechariah, and his mission is to preach repentance and baptize people to forgive their sins. John quotes the prophet Isaiah, again showing fulfillment at the right time of what has been promised by God, for he calls people to **“Prepare the way of the Lord.”**

This Advent you and I gather to practice waiting for the continued fulfillment of God’s promises. First we wait until Christmas Eve and Christmas day to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the fulfilling of God’s promise that God would raise up a savior from the House of David. That is the gift of waiting in the short term, for we already know that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit, and came among us as God Incarnate. So we church folks get to practice waiting a tiny bit in a culture that wants to fast forward, to get right to the good part, to move God’s time just a little to fit our schedule. That kind of waiting is not so hard and, honestly, the older we get the easier it is. On the other hand we are also asked to practice

waiting in the *really* long term for Jesus to come among us again as the Risen Christ. That is one promise that we've been waiting for so long that we might well be like Zechariah and be stunned if it happens in our lifetime. It is here that we live, between the already fulfilled promise of God coming among us in Jesus on that first Christmas, and the yet to be fulfilled promise of God returning to us in the Resurrected Jesus at the end of time. And it is in this space that we come together, week after week, to listen, learn, pray, worship, build community, and practice framing all of our waiting in the time between these two truths. It is not easy, this paying attention and waiting in trust and hope. French priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin captured our call to wait beautifully saying,

**Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.**

Amen