

Waiting

Well I wonder if you can think of a time when you simply couldn't wait for something to happen?

Perhaps you had that excited sense of anticipation – as you willed the thing you were waiting for to come, now. Or maybe you were experiencing a difficult and painful time of suffering, which you wanted over and done with.

Whichever way, a period of waiting can be challenging, confusing and in some cases unbearable.

Waiting is something which seems to be the opposite of the culture of the modern world. Not for everyone, I know, but for what seems like the vast majority, if you want something, you can get it quickly. Whether it be a finding out a piece of information, ordering a product or making contact with someone: a Smart Phone and an internet connection offer us the path to getting instant results and prevent that sense of impatience.

The benefits of this are plentiful – but wherever something positive exists, there is *always* a flip side, a negative alternative. For a society accustomed to instant gratification – when we are *forced to wait*, when technology is simply incapable of instantly filling our need, resolving our problem, or healing our pain, then it can be a genuine and hard struggle.

And I think this tension between instant results and waiting, and patience and impatience, is reflected throughout the Bible, and certainly in today's passages.

Biblical waiting

The Bible is full of people who are waiting on God to act.

These later chapters of the book of Isaiah were addressed to the Israelites who had seen their home city of Jerusalem virtually destroyed, along with its great Temple, by the invading Babylonians. Thousands of them were groaning in captivity a long way from home in the city, and by the rivers, of Babylon, where they did indeed weep and constantly petition God to come quickly and save them. How long would they have to wait for the rescue? Would it be similar to the five hundred years their ancestors had to wait in Egypt?

St Paul reflects not just on the Jewish people's wait or even that of the early Church, but on how the *whole creation* (ktisis) groans in waiting. Literally the entire created order, the heavens, the earth, and all the creatures. Everything God created from nothing is waiting for "*the revealing of the Children of God*" or in other words: Christ coming and bringing about the new creation, where the pain has stopped and the groans are replaced with praises.

In light of events of this past week, where the world has seen record temperatures and devastating weather; and continues to see war bring death and destruction to people and planet – these words seem as true today as they ever were.

This sense of waiting for God to act and bring about new creation and order was a question Jesus was faced with answering. With a repetitive history of waiting long periods before eventual deliverance, the Jewish people yet again found themselves groaning and under Roman subjugation.

7th Sunday after Trinity

Isaiah 44: 6-8, Romans 8: 12-25 & Matthew 13: 24-30, 36-43

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And so with the miracles he performed, and the wisdom he taught, Jesus was naturally seen by many as the fulfilment of all the hopes of the Jewish people: now surely the waiting is over, the Kingdom of Heaven has come, all will be well. But when he didn't simply overthrow the Romans and bring divine order, they began to ask the question of how long must we wait. Why not just uproot the enemy's Roman weeds right now and let the good faithful plants flourish?

And the Churches that Matthew was writing to were probably under some sense of persecution as well – how long before they were free to worship Jesus in peace and freedom.

Our waiting

For us today, whether it's a result of the culture we exist in, a desire to see something come to fruition, or a desperate need to end a period of suffering - we can all struggle as we wait. Impatience is very natural.

A while ago, I found myself falling into the trap of letting impatience overcome me. I am often complaining that when a new series starts on Television, as soon as the first episode is over, the announcer tells us that if we can't wait for a whole week for the next one, we can push a button and watch the entire series in one go. Now that might bring immediate satisfaction but what about the anticipation of waiting for the next episode - the conversations with others about what might happen, the feeling of having something to look forward to. Well, when it all got the better of me and I did indeed binge watch the whole series, I lost out on that anticipation and looking forward.

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So how will I cope with the bigger things in life – when I am forced to wait? How do people cope with waiting for grief to become less raw; or waiting for illnesses to be healed; or waiting to escape from a place or a situation which brings only pain?

There are many of us who want God to uproot and burn the weeds of grief, illness, loneliness and a thousand others things that exist in our lives. And yet we wait on...

Waiting well

God, in God's own wisdom seems to have built the need to wait into creation and intends us to learn something from our periods of waiting. Jesus did mark the eruption of the Kingdom of Heaven into the world but we live in a time when the Kingdom is 'now and not yet'. As Jesus teaches in the parable, the weeds will be reaped at the *right moment*, and that is not yet; until that time God needs the wheat, us, to be God's own witnesses in the field of the world. God needs us keep the faith, and to be seen keeping it.

Perhaps we can do that by how we deal with whatever we are waiting for the happen or end? We are shaped by *how* we wait as well as *what* we wait for.

So let us use our time of waiting well – resisting impatience and the anxiety it brings - and offering our waiting time to God. Asking and praying about how God wants us to spend that waiting time.

A truth that I firmly believe in is that when we find ourselves waiting on God, let's do what waiters do – and serve.

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So, friends, in this period of the *now and not yet*, and in this cluttered world of wheat and weeds, let us together wait well, serve well and be good witnesses for God. Amen