

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION:** The stories, and other elements of this sermon, contain copyrighted materials. We purchase them and have permission to use them in our parish, but not outside of it. Please do not post this sermon, or the stories in it, on any social media site. That would violate our agreement and subject us to a fine

**Lent 3 A, March 12, 2023**

**Liturgy 8: "Waiting in Traffic: Liturgical time and an unhurried God"**

**Read: Romans 8: 18 – 27 and/or memorize Romans 8: 24 b - 25**

**How many of you love to wait? Hands up high. I didn't really expect any hands to be up. Is there anyone who has never waited? No hands, not a surprise either. We don't like waiting, yet we do a lot of it. The world wants us to believe waiting is bad. Pastor Warren lives just outside of Pittsburgh, and she writes about waiting in traffic, which is a pretty common experience in larger cities. Perhaps, you've experienced it yourself**

**I was interested in the issue of waiting. So, I Googled, "How much time does the average person in America spend waiting?" Here were just a few "facts" I found: the average person spends an hour a day waiting in a line; that's two – three years in a lifetime. We spend two weeks of life waiting at red lights; and forty-three days in a lifetime on hold, unless you happen get a really bad company and then you might spend forty-four days, and that only scratches the surface of our waiting.**

**There are all sorts of places we find ourselves waiting, but waiting is not limited to places. We wait to say, "I'm sorry." we wait to call a sick friend. We wait to forgive. We wait to say, "I love you!" We wait to say "I'm sorry or I forgive you." Sometimes, when we wait too long, we can find ourselves waiting with regret.**

**I've been in situations like Tish describes, where I'm stuck in a traffic jam and all of a sudden someone honks; then someone else honks. Pretty soon there is this cacophony. What good does it do? I know what she means about being powerless at that point. We were once stuck on a road heading towards a beach in the Bronx with tens of thousands of people heading for a free concert while we were heading for a wedding. The wedding was to begin at 1; we were sitting in traffic at 1, not able to move. How powerless it felt.**

**Tish describes it, "I am impatient. I live in an instant world where I like to think I am the captain of the clock." Yet waiting reminds us that we are not the captain nor are we in control. Not being in control is one of those scary things that make us honk our horns in anger.**

**So why does God allow us to wait? He does it for our own good. As Tish says, "Waiting, therefore is an act of faith in that it is orientated toward the future." He's trying to slow**

us down from the frenetic pace we try to keep in order to maintain the illusion of our control. We spend major parts of our life waiting.

Some is inconsequential although frustrating; some is vitally important to us. We might wait for health, for healing, for the day to begin or to end, for rescue and redemption. And one of the things that we are all waiting for is the day when we will no longer walk this earth. Perhaps, that is the scariest part of waiting. To know that we have no control over our end of life and will have to let God be God.

All this waiting is meant to discipline us for the really big things that we should be waiting for, like the glory of God. His coming again as King and for the ultimate wait, the resurrection of our bodies that God tells us about in Revelation 22. As Christians, we understand that we live in “already, but not yet” time.

We hear it voiced in those famous words of confession, “Christ has come, Christ will come again.” What are we doing? We are waiting for Jesus. The dilemma is, if we are unwilling to wait a few minutes to get what doesn’t matter, how will we possibly wait for Jesus’ return?

I had never thought about this, yet, as I read it, it made sense to me. Tish tells us about theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar who suggests that “impatience is at the root of all sin.” He goes on to say, “God intended man to have all good ... but in God’s time; therefore, all disobedience, all sin, consists essentially in breaking out of time.”

He’s saying something we struggle with: We want what we want, when we want it. Sometimes, we’re not ready for what we want, so God has us wait. Sometimes, what we want will harm us, so God protects us by having us wait.

As Balthasar goes on, “Patience is the basic constituent of Christianity ...the power to wait, to persevere, to hold out, to endure to the end, not to transcend one’s own limitations, not to force issues by playing the hero or the titan, but to practice the virtue that lies beyond heroism, the meekness of the Lamb which is led.”

Patience is an incredibly hard lesson for us to learn. The only way we learn it is by waiting or suffering. It’s like that “already, not yet” time of scripture. Merchandisers know how important it is to have us waiting. We might complain that they put up the Christmas stuff in October but it begins to stir excitement in us. They know we want something to look forward to, so they provide it.

In the same way, the Church has a practice, a way of marking time so that we realize that time is not just a story, but is the story we live in. A story that we can remember and celebrate each year. What we crave is the familiar. It’s nice to have a little change, but

too much change makes us anxious. So, a long time ago, the Church created the church year.

Each section of the year has a preparation, a celebration and an introduction to the next step in that year. We start off with a trinity: Advent, which is not about getting ready for Christmas, but longing for a messiah. Christmas, His birth, and Epiphany, Jesus becoming better known by His actions and proclamation, ending with Transfiguration, where His Father announces Him..

Then we move to Lent, identifying with Jesus' temptation by our own fallen lives. We hear how he suffers and dies for us, so that we can live with Him in the Easter celebration. Now we know that the final enemy, death has been overcome. Then, the Holy Spirit helps us see the church as the vessel of the Kingdom of God, coming into view through our faith and actions, even as we wait for it to be fully revealed.

As Tish reminds us, there is always preparation before celebration. We need to prepare ourselves. We live with the tension of waiting by practicing it. We get involved with that rhythm that helps us to embrace the tension of our reality. "We live between D-Day and V-Day. The victory is secured, but the war continues a little longer."

We have been set apart, that's what the Greek word for church means, set apart to be witnesses to the story of Jesus, by living in it. That's what the church year helps us recognize. Rather than getting caught in the frenetic pace of life, to prove our worth, we enter the stream of God's love, seeing waiting as a gift, rather than a burden.

As Tish says, "We practice ways of waiting, hoping, slowing down, and – because of all that – truly celebrating because we have time, because we know that it is all in God's hands, we can focus on doing what God wants us to do." Because we have the time and energy, we begin to look around for all the needs, the good works, as Paul says God has prepared for us to do.

Our waiting is not static. As we wait, we pray and work, seeking to bring the Kingdom of God into view through the church, so that others may join us in our work. We focus our lives in the and death and resurrection of Jesus, remembering that it joins all who believe together. We wait for that Kingdom to break into our lives and hearts.

We can be patient but our patience is accompanied by longing. We look forward to what is to come. We know that the brokenness is not going to be forever. In the coming Kingdom, justice, love, compassion and righteousness will roll down like an ever - flowing stream.

As I was working in my office one evening last week, a person from one of the community groups stopped and asked if I was the pastor. When I said, yes, she asked, “Would you be willing to pray with me.” I said yes and invited her to a quieter place to talk.

She said she was trying to overcome some problems in her life. She knew who could help her, God, but was unsure if she could wait. She wanted prayer to be strong in Him; to reassure her of the forgiveness she needed.

At the same time, she affirmed she was part of God’s story, that different story. I talked about her being not just part of it, but in it. God is redeeming her just as He is redeeming us. As we wait, God is drawing us towards Him through the Holy Spirit.

As we move through this world waiting patiently, we are reminded that we moving. Just as a river is never the same, it’s always changing. So, our world is always changing because we are in it, bringing the Kingdom of God through Jesus’ love.

The Good News we share is that we don’t have to figure out how to come to Jesus, because He has come to us. He calls us to be everyday disciples and promises that He will always be with us. So, when we’re patiently waiting, the Spirit assures us that the waiting will end, in God’s time! It’s coming, because He is coming!

Count me in: (select one)

1. Notice your reaction to times where you are forced to wait this week. Reflect on what your response reveals about your view of time.
2. In the middle of a moment of waiting, stop and prayerfully reflect on how that moment sheds light on our life in the “already and not yet.”
3. Next time you’re waiting, try to limit distractions. Just simply wait. Notice your thoughts, emotions and surroundings.