

"The Advent of Patience" | Psalm 25:1-10, 20-22
Rev. Ellen Dawson | December 2, 2018
FOX CHAPEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
- 4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
- 6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!
- 8 Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
9 He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.
- 20 O guard my life, and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.
- 22 Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.

As we are all aware, the holiday season has begun. Houses are adorned with Christmas lights, people's calendars are filling up with get-togethers and parties, and we are hustling and bustling -- trying to get our gifts bought, our cookies baked, and our plans solidified.

Even with an early Thanksgiving this year, giving us an extra week between the holidays, everyone still seems to be entering into this season with a sense of restlessness. And that restlessness can lead to people being stressed out, worried, and impatient.

But that's the rhythm of our society, it seems. An article in the Boston Globe explains, "The demand for instant results is seeping into every corner of our lives, and not just virtually. Retailers are jumping into same-day delivery services. Smartphone apps eliminate the wait for a cab, a date, or a table at a hot restaurant. Movies and TV shows begin streaming in seconds. But experts caution that instant gratification comes at a price: It's making us less patient."

We live in a world where we have information at our fingertips through google -- gifts and gadgets delivered to our door the same day -- and even no lines for rides at Disney World with the Disney Fast Pass. While there are wonderful benefits, I encourage us to pause today and consider how we can even enter into the season of advent given the fast pace of our world.

Because Advent is about waiting, waiting for something - someone, very important. In fact, the word advent is defined as "the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event." For Christians, Advent is about waiting for the birth of our Messiah.

For anyone here who has ever experienced pregnancy or the birth of their child, nephew, niece, or grandchild, you know that there's nothing you can do but wait. Wait those 9 months. Wait through those doctors visits, tests, and ultrasounds. Wait for the baby to drop, for the water to break....wait for the miraculous moment...the birth...the arrival.

So it is no coincidence that we too, as part of our Christian practice, call these 4 weeks before Christmas Advent - a season of waiting - a time of expectancy - a few weeks out of our year to journey with the pregnant Mary and Joseph, remembering the words of prophets, and lighting candles of hope, peace, joy, and love -- all in an effort to patiently celebrate the light of the world born to dwell with us, the word made flesh, the Christ Child.

In today's passages, we read the words of King David, known for his courage, his loyalty, his faith, and his success as a leader, musician, and warrior. But David was great in other, lesser-known ways as well. In particular, David was a great man because he was not only willing to overlook others' sins but unwilling to overlook his own.

So what we see in this composition is David confessing past and present sins, pleading for mercy, and asking for Israel's redemption.

But what we also see, especially in light of this season of Advent, is that David (1) expresses trust in the Lord and (2) asks the Lord to teach him.

Why do I choose to point these out today? Well, because these, in my opinion, are the best examples of David's patience. And that's what Advent is all about, right? Waiting, with patience?

In David's expressions of praise and trust in the Lord, can you hear the waiting--the waiting that *has already* happened and the waiting *still to come*?

This Psalm is considered to be one of David's later compositions, because he mentions "the sins of his youth." Many speculate, too, that because of his prayers for Israel and the mention of enemies and needing refuge, that this was written during the time when his son Absalom was leading a rebellion against him. So, David had a pretty solid relationship with the Lord by this point in his life.

And yet, David prays, waiting for more.

David and the Lord had seen a lot of ups and downs. But what David knows is that the Lord has continued to watch over him, protect him, and love him. Over time, David came to know -- and trust -- the Lord in a deep, authentic way. So we know when he writes "in you I trust," he means it.

He pleads for deliverance and safety, waiting for the Lord. Waiting with trust.

What David expresses here is that trust takes patience. As flawed human beings, we don't just trust people right off the bat. And if we do, then we are scolded for being "too trusting." For a majority of us, it's just not in our nature to trust people - especially in the way that David trusts the Lord. We don't tell our deepest secrets to complete strangers or ask for protection for our lives from people we hardly know. To really trust someone, we need to develop a trust, a relationship, a mutual respect and understanding that can only come with time. We must first wait for trust before we can wait in trust, like David.

With the trust established, more time and more waiting is to be expected as David prays to learn more. He prays to be taught. He asks for the Lord to help him grow. In patience. With patience.

In all aspects of life, it takes patience for someone to learn something new. A new job, a new skill, a new smartphone. One can get easily frustrated if they don't learn something on the first try. Especially in our instant-gratification high-pressure world, we want to move fast, learn quickly. We also must look at the flip side -- Patience comes into play when teaching. From kindergarten teachers to professors with PhDs, the daily task of teaching can bring joy...and exhaustion. I consider my piano teacher, Mrs. Inman, and the fact that she truly had the patience of a saint -- to sit there while I fumbled my way through the latest scales and sheet music. I know from several of you with teenagers---it takes an enormous amount of patience to teach your kid to drive. But what David expresses and teaches us is that faith takes patience. And, thankfully, we have an eternally-patient God.

Let's look at what David writes - expressing this for us very clearly:

“Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.”

He continues,

“May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.

Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all its troubles.”

Matthew Henry explains, “This prayer is a prophecy that God would, at length, give David rest, and therewith give Israel rest from all their enemies roundabout. It is a prophecy of the sending of the Messiah *in due time* to redeem Israel from his iniquities and so to redeem them from their troubles.”

Brothers and sisters, This Psalm is an expression of trust and patience - David’s ability to wait on his Lord, and also of our Lord’s unfailing patience, faithfulness, and love for his children.

The season of Advent is a time for us to pause, slow down, and remember that love, found in the hope, peace, and joy we have in the Messiah, Emmanuel, Jesus Christ.

The Messiah didn’t come to us immediately, in a flash of lightning, instantly. There was no fastpass to the kingdom of God, no instant download of a Savior. God took his time to come to us. And in that trust-filled plan for salvation, God came on a peace-filled night, through the waiting of the virgin Mary, as a child, who would, in time, grow up to be a Rabbi who would ultimately give his life for each and every one of us.

So as we enter into and settle into these next 4 weeks, let’s carve out some time to slow down. Reflect. Do some waiting. To hand over some things to God with trust. To consider the patience of our God as he teaches us and as we open ourselves up to learn something new.

For as Charles Spurgeon writes, “It is our duty and our privilege to wait upon the Lord in service, in worship, in expectancy, in trust all the days of our life. Our faith will be tried faith, and if it be of the true kind, it will bear continued trial without yielding. We shall not grow weary of waiting upon God if we remember how long and how graciously he once waited for us.”

O Wisdom, Lord and Ruler, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Rising Sun, King of the nations,
Emmanuel, Come, Lord Jesus.