

Sunday 6 December 2020

Advent 2

A time of patience

God, we come to you in our waiting.

We wait in patient anticipation:

We are free and able to celebrate.

We have others around us to share in the journey.

We are able to wonder in the marvel of your gift.

God, help us to receive your love..

During this time of waiting, as we look forward to celebrating Christ's coming among us, we reflect on what God has done, is doing, and has still to do as he fulfils his promises to us. In our waiting we hear some words from Psalm 85:8-13.

⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

¹² The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

¹³ Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

“Lord, give me patience, and give it to me now.” We all want patience: patience with the world around us that never seems to be moving at the speed we want, patience with others who don't seem to see things as clearly as we do, patience with God as we wait for him to fulfil his age-old promises. But maybe we should first consider God's patience with us.

⁸ Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

¹¹ Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? ¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. (2 Peter 3:8–15a)

Patience, or being ‘slow to anger’, is a character trait often attributed God (cf Exodus 34:6f; Psalms 86:15; 145:8). This patience is a result of God, in love and mercy, putting up with the sins of sinners and withholding the judgment sin deserves at the time it is committed. This gives the sinner time to repent. But this time of mercy is not unlimited. Judgment will eventually come for the unrepentant, and the time of its coming is as unpredictable as the coming of a thief. We should not take so much comfort in the patience of God that we attach no urgency to repentance, or ignore the need to make the Good News that is Jesus known, having a false sense that there is plenty of time to attend to these things.

God’s patience with us offers us an opportunity. Peter is convinced that God will fulfil all his promises, but maybe not yet. In the meantime, “while we are waiting for these things” (14), we can make every effort to live lives of “holiness and godliness” (11) God’s patience is, therefore, a call to action, a time when we can share in God’s work. God, too, is waiting. He waits for all to turn to him, for God takes no pleasure in the thought of punishment (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; 1 Timothy 2:3f), and calls us, by our words and our deeds, to make known his love and mercy.

As we wait patiently for God to fulfil his promises we give thanks for the patience God shows towards us and we pause and pray for those whose patience is tried by their situation, and for those who try our patience.

Pause and pray

As Advent moves toward Christmas we remember that a time comes when our waiting will be over, and we will hear afresh the words spoken long ago by Isaiah to the Exiles.

¹ Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD’s hand
double for all her sins.

(Isaiah 40:1f)

And as we wait may we know the love of God this Advent.

May I be filled with love, Lord,
because you sent your Son to rescue me,
because Jesus is the centrepiece of everything.

May the love I have
be life-transforming,
be infectious,
be the driving force behind everything I do and say.

Amen.