

The Season of Impatience

A sermon by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers presented on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, December 11th, 2016, at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to Matthew 11: 2-11

Advent is supposed to be a season of waiting. And in many ways I guess it is. But in other ways it is not about waiting. Advent is more a season of fidgeting and nail biting and clock watching and finding parking in overflow malls and meal planning and mailing and shopping and wrapping and impatience. I don't know how many times I will be asked "Have I got my Christmas shopping done yet?" Please, stop asking me! Sure, there are other times throughout the year when we experience impatience. But this season, the Advent season is the climax of impatience, when all our anxiety and hurry and worry are concentrated into four short weeks.

We are busy preparing, each of us in our individual way, for something special to happen to us. Is this the right gift, or shall we seek another? Is this the right way for me to serve the poor, or shall I seek another? Is this the party I was waiting for, or is it another one? Is this the moment with my family that I was waiting for, or was I waiting for something else?

The horrible possibility lies in the back of our mind that our expectation will indeed go unfulfilled - that what we are waiting for will never happen - that we will forever sit lonely and empty by the side of the road like Vladimir and Estragon in "*Waiting for Godot*". Or waiting lonely by the window like The Beatles "*Eleanor Rigby*":

*Eleanor Rigby, died in the church - And was buried along with her name
Nobody came - Father McKenzie, wiping the dirt
From his hands as he walks from the grave
No one was saved - All the lonely people - Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people - Where do they all belong?*

John the Baptist, sits alone and lonely and cold and waiting in prison. And for what? Disturbing the peace – upsetting the power structures of his days – “a security threat” his critics said. And all centered in his ministry of being the advance man for the coming “Messiah”, the one who preaches love and justice for all people, especially the down and out of society. And John wonders if he has made the right choice, done the right thing. He had sense enough, in his impatience, and awaiting his fate to ask the right question: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Because that is the Advent question: is it not. Is this the present I've been waiting for? Is this the party, is this the family reunion, is this the date I've been waiting for? Is this the job I really wanted? Is this really the house we wanted so desperately two years ago? Is this really the person I loved twenty years ago? Is this really the person I love now?

We will find a precious gift, the gift of Christ; we will find reconciliation and peace – only if we have eyes to see beyond our expectations and our impatience – only if we look around us and notice new places where Jesus is working. "Go and tell John what you see and hear," said Jesus. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. The dead are raised up. The refugee finds a new home in a new land and the poor have good news preached to them."

Jesus Christ did not come to those people who had the details of his arrival all worked out. He came to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the poor, the refugee, the dead. He came to the downtrodden. He came in humility for the humble. He came for those who did not have it all worked out for themselves, for those who knew they needed Him.

When I was a little boy, all the presents I thought I wanted, I opened early. They were also the earliest to fade away. It was those last little presents under the tree that often lasted the longest. The presents I now remember in the fondest way were not the ones I wrote down on my Christmas list. There comes a moment when we know the children have grown up. It happens when they stop making Christmas lists for themselves. Remember how long and delicious those lists used to be? Some of us have grown up only recently. Some of us never will. We have the house we always wanted. We have the job security we wanted. We have that spouse, that husband or wife, who is the answer to all our dreams. We even have the car we wanted. We got our children into good schools. We have the insurances, the pensions, the health care. But is that all there is? Is this what we were waiting for?

Listen to what Jesus told John's disciples when they asked that question. Jesus said, "When you get me and get with my program, the lame walk, the blind receive their sight, the dead are raised, the poor get good news." What did all that mean? It meant that John's disciples, who had already repented and turned around once, were going to have to repent and turn around again. It meant that Jesus comes to reverse things. What was dead is now raised. What was blind now sees. What was lame now walks. When we get Jesus and understand what he was all about our lives are changed. The sign that Jesus has come is that people are changed.

Do we really want the gift of Christ this year? We will recognize the gift of love and peace when we recognize that we must change, too. No matter how young or old we are, whether we are impatient to receive that special gift, waiting to receive that special answer from our loved one, waiting for that special moment of reconciliation with our children or with our parents, we are also waiting ultimately for the Christ, the Saviour. John's question is really our question (John's impatience is our impatience): "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

It's reassuring to know that we are looking for love in all the right places when we look to our Christ. Christ the Saviour will change us. Christ the Saviour will turn us around. Even if we've changed before, even if we have repented before, "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. The refugee finds a new home in a new land and the poor have good news preached to them." Christ the Saviour will raise the dead again. Christ the Saviour is born.

"Hallelujah!" AMEN.