

WONDERS IN THE WAITING: PATIENCE, JUSTICE AND PEACE



Scripture:

Isaiah 40:1-11

¹Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak 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.

³A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!" ¹⁰See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

2 Peter 3:8-9 and 13-15a

⁸But 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. ⁹The 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.

¹³But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; ¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



**"GOD WILL STRENGTHEN YOU WHILE
YOU WAIT FOR CHRIST'S COMING!"**

This is the theme for this sermon series in these weeks of Advent.

Our sermon series is about the wonders in the waiting: what wonders we discover, what new insights we might see, what gifts God may be giving us if we are patient enough to receive them and having our eyes open wide enough to be aware.

Last week we lit the candle of hope and talked about the idea of gaining some strength from God during our waiting in the Advent season. We hope for strength that may help us cope with the stresses and pressures in this season and also strength that helps us have hope during this time of year.

STORIES OF STRENGTH AND HOPE

I asked for some of you to share stories of strength and hope. I heard a story about a family riding in a car that slipped off the edge of the wet pavement in the rain. The driver prayed and called out to God and the car seemed to just lift up and get back on the highway almost immediately.

I heard about a dream where people were all glowing brightly and that image gave the dreamer a new sense of purpose and hope for the future.

PEACE AND JUSTICE

This Sunday, we are looking at the wonder of peace that comes with patience and justice. We lit the peace candle on the Advent wreath and our scripture encouraged us to ponder the peace that surpasses all understanding that enables an ability to be patient in the midst of chaos.

I added justice and peace to my sermon title because there seems to be more chaos in the world this past week, and I must admit I am losing my patience with the police forces in our nation. So I am fervently praying for peace and justice.

Remember, this is coming from a person who has a lot of respect for the police. My son is on active duty with the Coast Guard which is in the Homeland Security Department, along with the police forces in our nation.

I worked for six years in San Francisco and in New Jersey with the police as a forensic nurse examiner helping victims of sexual

assault which included collecting evidence for the police. I coordinated each case that came in with the police, I have taught classes at a police academy and in local police precincts. So I consider them to be my comrades. And I have a good friend from college who is a police officer in Iowa.

MY FRIEND, OFFICER SCOTTIE

The last time I saw my friend Scottie, he said something that I think is key to the problems happening with police forces around our country today. When I asked him how he liked his job he said, "I'm tired of looking at people with an attitude that expects them to break the law rather than expecting good out of people." His view of humanity was pessimistic. He looked at people and expected the worst instead of the best. He had very little patience with people.

And it is sad to say but when that person that my friend, Officer Scottie, looked at was black, he expected even worse behavior than when he looked at a white person. His perception and expectations were skewed where he assumed they must be doing something wrong even if they were not doing anything suspicious. Some officers, like Scottie, expect people to behave badly based not upon fact but upon their prejudicial assumptions.

After talking with Scottie about his sad view of humanity I recommended it was time he retired from the police force. He had put in thirty years. A few months later he did retire, and he is much happier. No one should stay in a job when they have lost their ability to keep people safe in a professional objective way.

I have been praying for all the people involved in the tragic shooting and choking incidents that have happened in this past year. When we don't know how to respond, it is helpful to pray for both the victim's family and the police officer and his or her family. It is also helpful to turn to the Bible for guidance.

THE CALL FROM PETER

Peter in our reading today said, “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. But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.”

The call from Peter is to repent of our sins. God doesn’t want any of us to perish or feel disconnected from God or lost from God’s love. God wants us all to live in harmony with one another and to see diversity as a precious gift to be cherished. And in this desire for peace and harmony God wants us to work for righteousness which promotes freedom and justice for all. We must seek equal protection for all and equal access to the basic human rights and liberty.

THEY RISK THEIR LIVES FOR THE COMMON GOOD EVERYDAY

Despite these recent mistakes, I believe the great majority of police officers are doing a good job and they are risking their lives everyday for the common good. But there needs to be a better system for filtering out the bad eggs who go into police work because they crave the power and sense of authority that comes with the title.

If you watch the video of the New York Police Department police officer who jumped on the back of Eric Garner and put him in a choke hold, you will see that Daniel Pantaleo acted out of impatience with Eric’s complaints about the police harassing him. If Daniel had been more patient and professional in his approach to Eric, he would be alive today. These police officers are public servants. They are first and foremost to be our protectors and our security officers. I expect Daniel Pantaleo will lose his job because he clearly showed no

empathy to Eric Garner as he pleaded for help because he couldn’t breathe.

One study looking at how to better prepare police officers for their stressful jobs found it beneficial to incorporate more empathy training. Studies show that people with high levels of empathy are successful in many careers in life, not just in police work.

A SAD SIGN

During the protests I saw in the news, one sad sign showed the effect of these happenings on the reputation of police officers in general. There was a photo in the paper of a little boy holding up a sign after the grand jury decision in NYC. The sign said, “I wanted to be a cop, but not anymore after they killed Eric.”

An increase in the lack of trust in our police force is devastating for our country. We need to be able to depend upon those entrusted with our safety and security. So what do we do? How do we respond to these grave injustices?

Peter would say our role is: “Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.”

We are not to give up hope. We are to be patient and while we are patient we are to be at peace, and check to make sure our own behavior promotes peace and righteousness. “Peace begins at home.” The most important place where we are to behave peacefully in non-prejudicial ways is first at home in your neighborhood.

SHOW NO DISCRIMINATION

Our role modeling as followers of Jesus is to show no discrimination against anyone of another color or culture. You can be an example of peace and righteousness here in this church, your neighborhood, school and at your job. Your example of acceptance, compassion, outreach and love may seem like a small ripple in the whole world’s problems. But when there are many small ripples they join together into a big ripple that can reach out far into the ocean of disharmony and turn the tide, as Martin Luther King, Jr. did.

It is not easy to confront the current race relation problem in our country. But it must be done. Pastor Carol Howard Merritt in the Christian Century journal wrote that “the church today must address issues of racial violence. She says it is a sin to be silent because silence empowers evil.”

Elie Wiesel who saved thousands of Jews in World War II said, “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Yet in the midst of our reaction to tragic police shootings we still want to believe that the police will protect the good and put away the bad. We want to believe that anyone who gets hurt by the authorities must have been doing something wrong. We want to believe that justice will be doled out fairly and that our system of privilege does not oppress the vulnerable in society. And we must remember that all of us sin and fall short of the glory of God. All of us in various ways are also responsible for the beauty in the world and we are responsible for promoting peace in the world. Elie Wiesel also said, “Humankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures, it is our gift to each other.”

GOD IS CALLING US

As Christians we are called to root out all evil, fear and prejudice in our government systems. God’s love and compassion for all people delivers us from evil. As followers of Jesus Christ we remember that Jesus was a victim of prejudice as he was ridiculed for being from Nazareth. He was a victim of the politically powerful when the Pharisees and Sadducees ran him out of the temple and tried to throw him off a cliff. The Roman authority also treated the Jewish people prejudicially and were greatly threatened by Jesus and his

political success. So they tortured and crucified him under the watchful eye of their governor. As followers of Jesus we are to come alongside and advocate justice for those who suffer due to prejudice and oppression by the governing authorities.

Pastor Merritt goes on to say in her Christian Century article that: “those of us in the privileged class often refuse to confront issues of racial violence.” When we don’t try to heal these problems, we are like Pontius Pilate washing our hands trying to avoid the controversy.

Why do we do this? Why do we blame the victim? Due to our own fears we often distance ourselves from those suffering from discrimination.

We must stop the Pontius Pilate-like hand washing and quit pretending that the violence has nothing to do with us. We should never forget or erase the history of innocent bloodshed because we are called to see and remember the blood and the bodies that were unjustly sacrificed.

The power in these memories of injustice is that they can provoke us to do something to prevent these tragedies from happening again. What that is you will have to figure out yourself. But God is calling us to be patient with ourselves and with others while at the same time working for justice and peace. Amen

Benediction:

May this week be a week of Hope and Peace and patience leading up to next week which is Joy. Keep the love of God at the forefront of your heart and mind all week as you strive to be as peace-giving as possible while you wonder in this time of waiting.

And now may the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
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