

Waiting... Waiting... (Ascension Sunday, May 24th, 2020)

Waiting to be born; waiting to die, and all the waitings in between. So much of our lives consist in waiting, waiting for something to happen. For something good to happen or for something whose anticipation brings on worry or fear.

For a person who likes things to happen now and according to a schedule, waiting can be irritating because it reminds us that we are not in control.

Waiting in line at the Bank; waiting for a diagnosis; waiting for a parent to breathe her last breath, waiting for the light to turn green, waiting for the decision of the Parole Board. As much as we would like to control our lives, waiting reminds us that much of the time, we can only wait and see.

Waiting for a Pandemic to end, waiting for restrictions to be lifted, waiting to see someone whom we haven't been able to see in months, waiting to see if there will be a second wave of virus washing upon our shores. Waiting.

This year, it feels like the brakes have been applied to our lives, our economies, and social life in our small towns. We have all had to slow down and almost stop. And wait, wait for the daily news briefing from M. Trudeau and M. Legault, and the medical advice from Dr. Teresa Tam and Dr. Horacio Arruda.

Waiting for the soothsayers to bring a word of hope, a promise of life returning to normal. Even while we remember, that normal wasn't so great. Normal was too busy, too fast, too impersonal, too unequal, because some people profited from normal and while others suffered in poverty and neglect. But the old bone can look pretty good when you don't know what better food is on the horizon.

Slide #1

Acts/ Painting from Cameroon of the Ascension of Christ.

Here is one way to picture the Ascension. Jesus floating up into the clouds. It's what most of us imagine in our minds, even while it seems pretty incredible to believe literally. But what is certain is that he died, was buried and rose again and was seen by many whose eyes were opened to his presence. And for some 40

days, his followers knew Jesus in their presence, in the breaking of bread and in the sharing of the scriptures. But even this blessed period of their lives was to come to an end. And the message was received that he would be departing from them, but that he would not leave them desolate. Rather, they would know in a powerful way, the blessing of the Holy Spirit of God who would be in them and around for all times and in all places. Wait, said Jesus, wait for this gift of the Holy Spirit.

Luke put it this way in the Acts of the Apostles: “While staying with them, Jesus ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.”

It sounds familiar to us now. Stay in your region. Don’t go out socializing. Wait. Wait until the promise of freedom is given.

Well, what could they do but wait? Of course, we’re lucky, we know the ending to this story. About a week later, gathered in a upper room in Jerusalem, they are suddenly struck by the profound movement of God’s spirit within and around them, propelling them out onto the crowded streets of Jerusalem, to proclaim God’s love for all through Jesus Christ.

But we are not there yet. We are still in that in between time. A time of waiting. A time of uncertainty. And in this year of global pandemic, we live with anxiety and fear of what is to come. *And we are the fortunate ones in the world*, who still have some money and some means; what about those already living on the edge?

While the disciples were waiting for something good to be delivered from God.com , we are not very certain of the what the future holds for us. We try to live day by day, but distress and unease haunt us. On sunny days we tell ourselves not to worry, it will all work out, *ça va bien aller*. The next day, after listening to all the news and predictions of economic hardship and social disruption, we fall into despair again. In our waiting, where do can we find hope?

Slide #2

Jesus with robin’s nest on his arms – from SSJE

Here is a photo taken by one of the brothers at SSJE in Cambridge, Mass.

Even the brothers, who live in community and offer hospitality for those who come apart for a time of quiet prayer and refreshment, have had to close their monastery to outside guests. But here, this robin has made her nest on the arms of Jesus. Building its home, laying her eggs, waiting for the time of birth to arrive.

We can think of ourselves like this robin, building our lives in the arms of Jesus. Laying down our lives, with all our cares and worries about the present and the future, into the embrace of Jesus and waiting for a new birth to occur.

In his reflection upon this photo from their monastery, Brother Curtis Almquist wrote about waiting. “In a dark night, you may wish for the dawn to come soon, but, of course, it will come on its own time. We are waiting now (he wrote) for a resolution of the Coronavirus crisis; however, for so many of us, that time frame is beyond our control... (and while we do what we can to mitigate its effects), we still face an element of waiting for what is beyond our ultimate control. We are working and we are waiting.”

We must be patient: The word patient comes from Latin, “a quality of suffering” Living life patiently is difficult to do. Waiting is difficult to do, particularly if it involves suffering.

In order to attend to this birth during this crisis, we must be patient in our labor. We do need people working again; but perhaps being paid more justly. We do want to travel and visit again, but perhaps without destroying the planet. We do want the economy to rebound; but not so the super wealthy can monopolize trade and profits.

How can the Christian Church bear witness the new life which can be born out of this pandemic? Are we anxious to get back to normal? Or do we hope for a different normal, one in which all of God’s people matter and all of Creation matters more than GDP.

Slide #3 Man Waiting for the Sunrise

And so, here we are waiting.

Waiting for the package from Amazon to arrive at our front door.

Waiting for our groceries to be delivered from IGA by a friendly volunteer.

Waiting to find out when we can gather in church in flesh and blood, with bread and wine and touch one another again with affection and love.

Waiting for your bishop to lay hands upon you and ordain you as a priest in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Waiting for the gift of the Spirit to come upon us and burst the confines of our hearts and minds so that we might share the love God with all kinds of people.

When you think about it, Church is a form of waiting. We are a bunch of people who have made a lifestyle out of waiting upon the Lord. A Lord who will hear our cry and come to us.

But if we wait, it is not with the simplistic slogan of *Ça va bien aller/ It's going to be alright*. Because in fact, it's not alright. The world wasn't alright before the pandemic and it hasn't improved since the pandemic – except there is less pollution and more kind people helping other people, and heroism in the medical field, and talk about the need for a Guaranteed Basic Income, and a push to become more environmentally friendly, and a questioning about consumer consumption and inequality in our world, and so on - so much good is occurring in this disruptive time.

If it's going to be alright, it will be because enough people will have caught a fresh wind of this Spirit which is blowing across the earth; a Spirit of Unity, a Spirit of kindness, a Spirit of Justice and desire for real peace through reconciliation. It is possible to work and to wait in this kind of hope.

Ephesians – Paul (who spent time in the confinement of a prison, waiting, praying and hoping)
 “I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,

And so, we wait in this hope for the Spirit of God to come upon us afresh.
 We wait for Pentecost
 We wait for this sermon to end.
 We wait. We wait. **Amen.**