

Preparing for Glory  
Isaiah 40:1–5, 27–31; 2 Peter 3:8–15a  
Sunday, June 21, 2020

So last week I talked about how we were celebrating the High Holy Day of the Last Day of School. And in the life of the church, certain holy days have certain phrases or liturgies associated with them. On Easter we say, “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!” On Pentecost we pray, “Come, Holy Spirit!” On Christmas we say, “Emmanuel – God is with us!” Well, the Holy Day of the Last Day of School has a liturgy associated with it, too. And those of you who are parents of young kids have probably heard this liturgy being recited over the past week. Because in *our* house, it has been practiced multiple times each day. The liturgy that follows the last day of school is, “I’m *bored!*”

Now, Jen and I always respond to them with something that we heard years ago from Bob Risk. For those of you who don’t know him, Bob was a longtime member of St. John’s who died four years ago. He was a *really* great, funny, outgoing guy – Bob was *never* bored – and Bob always used to say, “Being bored is a *choice*. And you can *choose* to do something else.” So we say that to *our* kids. The *problem* is, this year they are a little more limited in what they can *do*. So they’ve played video games, they’ve watched TV, they’ve played with their toys, but now it’s too *hot* or it’s *raining* so they can’t go outside, and they can’t go over to a friend’s house. They don’t want to play with *each other*. They are tired of doing what they have *been* doing, and they want to do *something else*.

And this year, I *feel* that. Because I am tired, too. I’m tired of this virus that is dictating our lives. I’m tired of wearing a mask everywhere I go. I’m tired of the church being closed, and I am tired of Zoom meetings, and I am tired of recording videos and preaching to an empty sanctuary each week. I’m tired of being away from you all. I’m tired of the political

polarization that only seems to have gotten *worse* through all of this. I mean, since when is a *virus* a *partisan issue*? How did we *get* here? I'm *tired* of it. I'm tired of racial injustice and seeing *yet another* black man – this time Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta – killed by police. Like my kids, I'm *so tired* of doing the same things that we have *been* doing over and over again, and I want to do *something else*. It's like that poem by Langston Hughes, where he writes, "I'm so tired of waiting, aren't you, for the world to become good and beautiful and kind." I think a lot of us, for a lot of different reasons right now, are tired of waiting.

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The people of Israel were tired of waiting. Most biblical scholars think that the book of Isaiah was written over the course of *hundreds* of years. It starts off in the 700s BC, when the Assyrians invaded and conquered Israel and forced the Jewish people to go live in foreign lands. Then *they* were conquered by the Babylonians, and *they* were conquered by the Persians. By the time we get to our reading today in chapter 40, it has been around 200 years that the people of Israel have been living in exile. Two hundred years of *waiting* to go home.

Chapter 40 begins with Isaiah speaking words of comfort, saying to Israel, "You have served your term. Your penalty is paid. The punishment for anything that you have done wrong is over. You're going home." But not *yet*. The good news of their return has been *announced*, but there is still a little more time before they actually get to go home. It's like Israel has moved from red to yellow. They're almost there, but they still have to wait a little longer.

Well, after 200 years, the people of Israel feel *abandoned*. They feel like God has forgotten about them. So the prophet reassures them. He says, "The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary. God's understanding is unsearchable. God gives *power* to the faint and *strengthens* the powerless. Even youths will

faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” He is encouraging them to be patient in their waiting; that God will give them the strength and energy they need to endure. *Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.*

But I can imagine the people of Israel hearing that and saying, “Those who wait for the Lord?! We’ve been waiting for the Lord for 200 years! We’re *tired* of waiting!” But the word that Isaiah uses there for *wait* is the Hebrew word *qavah*, and it doesn’t just mean sitting around and doing nothing while time passes. We often think of *waiting* as being a *passive* thing. But that word *qavah* also means, “to watch, to expect, to hope.” In certain instances it gets translated as, “to collect or gather together.” It implies something *active*. You’re not just sitting around passively waiting for something to happen. You’re *watching* for it. You’re *expecting* it. You’re *hoping* for it. You’re gathering yourself and your things together in anticipation of it. This is *active waiting*.

Isaiah calls the people of Israel to this kind of active waiting. He gives them a *task*. He says, “In the wilderness *prepare the way of the Lord*. Make a path in the desert for God. Every 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. *Then* the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” What Isaiah is talking about here is an image that comes up repeatedly in the Hebrew scriptures. It’s an image of justice. The high being brought down, the low being lifted up, so that everyone is on the *same level*. When Isaiah says, “Make a path in the desert for God,” he refers to that path a few verses later as “the path of justice.”

So in the midst of their exile and their waiting, Isaiah calls the people of Israel to prepare the way and make a path for God by doing the work of justice and ensuring that all people are being treated equally, because through *that* the glory of the Lord will be revealed. While they are waiting, they are *preparing for glory*.

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We see something similar with the Christians that Peter is writing to. This is the *second* letter of Peter, and back in the *first* letter Peter says he is writing to “the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” Now, when Peter says, “exiles,” there is some question as to whether he means people who have been displaced from their homes, like the Jewish exiles Isaiah was addressing, or whether he means a more *spiritual* exile – that they are citizens of heaven living on earth, citizens of the Kingdom of God living in the kingdom of man, where they are not welcome or at home. But either way it’s this idea that they are *displaced*.

And like the Jewish exiles hundreds of years earlier, *they* are tired of waiting, too. Scholars think that this letter was written around the year 125 AD, around 100 years after Jesus died, rose, and ascended into heaven. So for 100 years, they have been waiting for Christ to return, certain that he was coming back *in their lifetime*. The Kingdom of God would come upon the earth, all that was wrong would be made right, and they would be gathered in to dwell in the presence of God forever. Well, 100 years have passed, and it hasn’t happened yet. And the people *around* these Christians have started mocking them, challenging their faith, *scoffing* as Peter says. They’re saying, “Where is he? You keep saying he’s coming. Has he *forgotten* about you? Is he just *slow*? How long is it going to take?” And they don’t know.

So Peter writes to them and says, “Do not ignore the fact that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. The Lord is not *slow* about his promise, as

some think of slowness, but God is *patient* with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” Peter is calling them to be patient. But there’s this idea again that *patience* and *waiting* doesn’t just mean sitting around and doing nothing. They have *work* to do while they are waiting. Peter says, “What sort of persons ought you to be while we are waiting for Christ to come? We should live lives of holiness and godliness and peace, striving to be found without spot or blemish, as we wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God.” *Wait for and hasten....* They are *waiting* for something, but they are also *actively bringing it about*. While they are *waiting* for a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness is at home, they are called to *live in ways* that make that righteousness a reality.

But that word *righteousness* that he uses is the Greek word *dikaiosune*, and it means *righteousness*, but it *also* means *justice*. So like Isaiah, Peter is calling these Christians to do the work of justice while they wait for the coming of the Lord, because in *that* they will be *hastening* – actively working to bring about – a new heavens and new earth where righteousness and justice is at home. While they are waiting, they are *preparing for glory*.

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In their waiting, the people of Israel in *their* exile and the Christians in *their* exile are all called to practice patience and righteousness and justice, and through *that* the glory of the Lord will be revealed. In the same way, *we* are experiencing a kind of exile right now. As a *church*, we are displaced from our building, displaced from one another. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God living in the kingdom of this world, and so there is a sense in which we are not *at home*, and the things that *we* are called to be about – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, justice – we don’t see those things being reflected in the world around us. We experience the political discord and the racial injustice that has been festering for so long, and it’s like we’re *waiting* for a path to open up so that we make our way to a new world where righteousness and justice are at home.

In all of that, we are called to practice patience, to wait for the Lord and find strength in the Lord, trusting that God will give us what we need to endure. But that patience does not mean sitting around doing nothing. We are *also* called to live lives of holiness and godliness and peace; to practice *righteousness* and *justice*. While we are waiting, we are called to prepare the way of the Lord and hasten the coming of the day of God. We are called to *active* waiting, to *purposeful* patience, to prepare this world for the glory of the Lord. We are called to *be* the change that we want to see in this world.

If we are *tired* of the way things *are*, then we can *choose to do something else*. If you are tired of *waiting* for the world to become good and beautiful and kind, then *make* the world good and beautiful and kind.