

Proper 27A

Matthew 25:1-13

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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Hurry up and wait. This is what we do in that period of time between being told that something will happen and the actual happening. For example, arriving at the airport two hours before departure only to find out that your flight has been delayed and will now take off at eight rather than at noon. Or calling customer support, “Your call is important to us. Please remain on the line for the next available representative,” and then you listen to some obnoxious music on a loop for the next hour or so. Or sitting in a hospital room waiting for news of a loved one. Hurry up and wait.

Our Gospel reading today could be entitled “Hurry Up and Wait” for that is what the bridesmaids end up doing. They showed up at the appointed time, but the bridegroom’s time of arrival was delayed. Delayed so long that they all fell asleep. The bridegroom finally arrived, catching some of them unprepared to light the way for him as he parades to the wedding venue and feast. A wait that was expected to be quick turned into a long period of hurry up and wait.

When I was ten years old, the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circus was coming to town to perform at the Lloyd Noble Arena. Once the circus train arrived, there was going to be a parade from the railroad siding at the train depot all the way down to the arena. It was the middle of summer, and my friend and I begged and pleaded with our moms to let us go down to the railroad tracks to wait for the circus to arrive so we could watch the parade. Much to our relief, they conceded.

The circus train was supposed to pull into Norman at ten a.m. We arrived at the tracks about an hour early, not wanting to miss it. There was already a throng of people waiting around the train depot. We found a parking spot in a gravelly lot south of the depot and began the vigil. Ten o’clock rolled around. No train in sight. Then eleven, twelve. Freight trains came and went, but never the circus.

This was before the days of cell phones and instant information. All we had was the radio in the car to keep us updated. We heard that the new time of arrival was two o’clock. It came and went. People began leaving, but not us. We were in for the long haul. We continued to wait. As the day stretched on, we came up with different things to help pass the time, sometimes just sitting in silence watching the world go by. Around five o’clock the circus train finally chugged into town. We waved and cheered, our eyes lit with excitement as the performers and animals began the parade down the street. It was a day of hurry up and wait, but the reward was well worth it.

Waiting, Jesus says, is what the kingdom of heaven will be like until he comes again. But the reward is worth the long wait. Notice that he doesn't say, "is like" or "may be compared to". He says, "will be". He is being definitive that at some point in the future he will come again. In other words, hurry up and wait my friends, for the time of my return is TBD- to be determined. Pass your time of waiting wisely.

At the time Matthew was written, Christ's followers had been waiting a few decades for his return. They struggled with the wait, perhaps even wondering if they had missed it as news travelled on foot or by donkey. Here, we are, over two thousand years later, still waiting. Jesus' parable, along with the ones before and after, help to remind us that God's time isn't the same as our time. Time as we know it, is a human construct.

In my middle school years, I attended the Southern Baptist Falls Creek Summer Camp. I was told, definitively, that the waiting for Christ's return would end in 1984 which also happened to be the same year as my senior year of high school. It made my senior year very stressful as I kept wondering if the world was going up in flames before I had the chance to walk across the stage to receive my hard-earned diploma. But this prediction was just as wrong as all the others; 1984 came and went without Christ dropping down from heaven. Predications of his second coming continue to be made because we want to know when the waiting will end. Waiting isn't something that people do well, particularly in our current culture. We always seem to be in a rush.

Sitting still. Resting in silence. Being content with just simply being as we wait. These things are hard, maybe even creating anxiety as we think about all the things we could be doing instead. We are driven to do, to accomplish. Our attention spans are short. When an end goal never gets any closer, it begins to fade in our consciousness. Delays aren't really our thing, possibly because we fail to see any purpose for them.

Yet, delays are opportunities. An opportunity to finally have a conversation that you have been putting off. An opportunity to learn something new or pick up a book you have been meaning to read. An opportunity to reconcile, to work on a broken relationship. An opportunity for a nap and rest. An opportunity to grow into a deeper relationship with God, to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. We proclaim this in preparation for the Eucharistic feast. Christ is present with us in the bread and wine, but until his physical return, during this time of hurry up and wait, we are called to live a servant life, so that others can see the hand of God at work in the world. We are called to let Christ's light shine through us, lighting the way for his return. Each load of laundry at a Laundry Love event testifies to Christ's presence. Every time we share someone's burden, we testify to the presence of Jesus. Each meal we serve to our unhoused friends; the socks, school supplies, and shelf stable food we collect; our presence at Pride events; every time we fight against social injustice; they all testify to the presence of Christ risen.

And when the time comes that the metaphorical oil in our lamps has run out, when we feel like we are running on fumes, we can know that it is OK to rest and recharge. After all, when God

created the world, he didn't keep on going like the Energizer bunny®. He rested. Our spiritual batteries, the thing that keeps us doing the work that Jesus has given us to do, are recharged through prayer and worship together.

We wait together. As Paul tells the Thessalonians, "Therefore, encourage one another". All those years ago, as I waited for the circus train to arrive, the waiting was made easier because I shared it with a friend. We kept reminding each other of the promise of arrival and the reward that was to come.

Church is much like that. When we come together in this place, we can bolster each other's lagging spirits in a way that isn't completely possible from a distance or through the internet. Here we give hope and comfort to each other. It is a place to celebrate joys, to console and lend strength, to share the grief and pains that come with life. These too are moments that testify to Christ's presence. Church is a thin place between human and divine, where we are reminded of Christ's promises and are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. It helps us to find God in the waiting, to sense his presence always with us.

Waiting is hard, yet it is part of life. There are all manner of things for which we wait. But we don't wait alone. Jesus is with us. We are surrounded by an unfathomable love that lift us up giving us the energy to share Christ's love with the world around us. Our brothers and sisters in Christ, are with us. We help each other keep the faith, so that we can bring the light of Christ to a broken and hurting world as we hurry up and wait.