

## **“Promise, Patience, Peace”**

Isaiah 11:1-10; 2 Peter 3:8-15a – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn  
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*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that our hearts might be renewed as we await your promise of peace. In the name of the One coming into the world, Amen.*

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A number of years ago, we were in this very sanctuary, and I was up here giving the announcements as worship began. And in through the door and down the aisle walked Dick & Judy Bell. And my mind was simultaneously confused, because Dick & Judy live in Alabama and I didn't know what they were doing here, but also instantly clear, because of course they were walking in after the announcements had started; Dick & Judy have never been on time for worship in their lives!

I mention Dick & Judy because naming local names seems like a recipe for trouble. But the truth is that we all have our own particular relationship with time, and fellow church members are some of the folks whose relationship to time we're most likely to be aware of. Without much trouble, I bet you could list 5 people in your life who are late to pretty much everything, and because they're slightly less common, let's say 3 people who show up early most of the time. You know which one you are. Maybe you've accepted this about yourself, maybe you're constantly fighting it. But one of the most important things to recognize is how much tension it injects into your relationships.

There's another side to this story. It's important to respect our differences, and it's clear that everyone's brain works differently, including how we relate to time. There are cultural differences relating to time that we must be aware of as well. But on another level, time and how we operate within it is also about mutual respect. When we make people wait for us or take more of their time than is necessary to accomplish what needs to get done, it can be interpreted as putting our desires and comfort above their needs. Some people relate to time in such a way that it would never occur to them that being late is disrespectful. But others absolutely see tardiness as a way of communicating disrespect, a de-valuation of their time and therefore them as well.

Folk singer Holly Near has a song that reflects on this fundamental incompatibility regarding time. It's one of the saddest, grown-up break-up songs I've ever heard. She describes what it feels like to constantly be waiting on her unnamed partner, who repeatedly insists that it's just "about time," that is, not a reflection of their feelings for her, but just the way they're made. But "no," she says, "no, it's about love." In the final chorus, she gives in, implying that, okay, if it's really just about time, there is a basic disconnect here and I can't live with it anymore, at which point her partner's attention is suddenly caught and they are now pleading, "no, no, it's about love". The last line has the singer saying, "well, hey, it's about time." And though they have finally come to an understanding, you don't get the feeling they're going to live into it together.

I bring all of this up to remind us of the depth of the complexity of our relationships to time, just as a bunch of different human beings, before we now turn to contemplating how our relationship with time compares to God's. "With the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day," we read in Second Peter. Apparently, God has no clear sense of time at all! As much as writers and theologians have tried to help us live within "God's time" – "kairos" you'll hear it called – the bottom line is that we usually end up declaring it a mystery. Which is a little inconvenient, since there's a lot we're waiting for at the moment.

It's the Second Sunday of Advent, and we're invited to consider Peace. The vision of the peaceable kingdom from Isaiah 11 illustrates how comprehensive the shalom God desires is; it's not just about good will between nations, but about harmony within all creation. And it feels really impossible and far away. How long must we wait? The Second Letter of Peter is one of the latest of the New Testament writings, which means the early Christian community who received it had been waiting for Christ's return for much longer than they had expected. Things were getting worse, not better, and peace seemed far away. "How long must we wait?" they must have been asking.

But the writer of Second Peter throws a new wrinkle in: "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." What if this whole time we thought we were waiting on God, it turns out God has been waiting on us? We come to our

prayers with a long list of tragedies erupting in our lives and our world, demanding to know how God could let all that happen. But what if God says, “I could ask you the same question”? What if our sense that things are taking way too long is really just a measure of God’s patience with us?

Let us be clear: our relationship with God is not one between equals. We do not share equal responsibility for saving the world. We humans do not hold eternity in our hands. We can barely imagine a thousand years, let alone live that long. God holds the beginning and the end. But we are not powerless. We have more capacity to change things and set things right than we imagine. While we look to “the end,” enchanted by the visions of shalom Isaiah shares, the practices of our faith are about the meantime, the things we can do to build peace while we’re waiting for the new earth where righteousness is at home.

Does it feel like God is late? Could it be that God is just patient, waiting for us to discover the ministries we’re called to in this meantime? I’m not saying it’s not a mystery, because it clearly is. But there’s a lot we can keep busy with till that “day of the Lord” comes like a thief to surprise us. We have ways of pursuing righteousness for the poor and equity for the meek. We can live lives that minimize hurt and destruction and teach our children not to hurt or destroy either. Second Peter invites us to ponder “what sort of persons ought you to be,” and our faith offers us some clear answers. It’s time to be about love! Hallelujah and Amen.