

Raise your hand if you feel as though you are impatient? It looks like we tend to be an impatient crowd. And in our American culture we are trained to be impatient. We expect problems to be solved quickly. We expect answers quickly. We expect to see results quickly. Amen? We do not like to wait.

There is at least one family here that may have something very important to teach us Americans. I am told that in Jamaica that if things don't happen quickly then the response is "no problem." That is not something you hear very many Americans say. We are much more prone to say, "This is a problem and it needs to be fixed now."

That is also something that the 5 of us who went to Liberia learned. Liberians have to be patient. They may not have electricity for days or even weeks. They may not have transportation if they need to get somewhere. If a worship service is supposed to start at 5 pm and the preacher does not show up until 7 pm then that is just the way it is. Patience is not a virtue. Patience is the way of life.

There is one detail in this story that we are about to read that may tend to be overlooked by many of us if we do not pay attention to this detail. But it's the part of the story that I want us to focus on today. If we find ourselves impatient with how quickly God seems to act in our lives then this is a detail that God's Holy Spirit may be wanting us to pay attention to.

The story we are about to read is a rather lengthy story. It is found in the gospel of John. John includes stories that tend to be rather long compared to the other 3 gospels. John tends to be more of a storyteller than the other 3 gospels tend to be. I am going to read this story from the Message translation since it reads more as a story than other translations.

**Read John 11:1-44**

Jesus hears about Lazarus being ill and he decides to wait two more days. What was Jesus doing that was so important that he had to wait when he got this dire news about Lazarus' medical situation? We are not told. All we are told is that Jesus felt it necessary to wait 2 days before he did anything about it.

When we read the Bible we may discover that there numerous places where God seems to take a lot of time to get accomplished what God wants accomplished. The Hebrew people were slaves for 400 years before God spoke to a man named Moses through a burning bush and guided him to lead the people out of slavery.

When Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians in 587 BC and the Israelites were once again taken off into slavery it was another 50 or so years before God allowed them to return to their homeland. It was during this period of time that our first Scripture from Ezekiel was written. It was during this time that Ezekiel imagines a return to his homeland. A vision when God would breathe new life into old and decaying bones.

It was 400 or so years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. God does not seem to be in the business of bringing about justice in a quick fashion. God seems to be rather slow at times? Amen?

And being frustrated by God's slowness may be where we are today. Maybe you are in a place of great pain and you want God to fix your pain right now. Maybe you are witnessing a friend going through a difficult time and you want relief for your friend now. Maybe you have a friend or relative that is making some poor choices and you want them to turn their life around now. But God is not in the quick business. God seems to be a patient God. If scientists are correct that God took billions of years to create the universe then that shows us that God is a patient God.

So what do we learn from the passage today about what happens during God's deliberative acts? What happens during this time when Jesus decides to wait?

The first learning is that God allows heartache in this time of delay. Jesus does not take away the pain of Mary and Martha. Jesus does not prevent Lazarus from dying. Pain and suffering is not something that Jesus feels needs to be avoided. Jesus himself, in our reading, shows his own understanding of pain when he weeps at the news of Lazarus' death.

So in this period of waiting Jesus affirms that it is OK to feel and experience pain. Pain and sadness is important and natural. Not fun but necessary. Pain and sadness are a part of the world that God created. Jesus seems very comfortable with his own pain and Jesus does not try to cover over his pain with something like alcohol. Pain may be something that is necessary in this time of waiting.

I was told by someone this week about seeing a church sign that says, "He is risen." I never like seeing that on a church sign during Lent and Holy Week. We are not yet celebrating Jesus resurrection. We are in this season when we are recognizing the pain in our lives and in our world. We are in the season of Lent when we are invited to recognize that Jesus will give himself over to pain and persecution on our behalf. We do not run to the resurrection without affirming the pain of the Holy Week story.

We do not live on our time. We live in God's time. And that means we have to be very, very patient. As a pastor I can get very impatient. When I hear people clamoring for this or that program I want us to move quickly and get whatever up and running. When I hear people share sadness in their life I want them to quickly move toward healing. But our time is not God's time.

Ezekiel was told by God that while he was waiting on God to restore Israel that he was to testify. That is good advice for us as well. While we wait on God, we use this time to tell about what we do see God doing. We use this time of waiting to look for the ways of God. We use this time to focus and to trust that God will provide.

"Jesus, come quickly. Lazarus is dying," Jesus is told. Jesus responds by taking 2 days and doing nothing in response.

What are you hearing similarly in your life? What action are you being told needs to be accomplished right now? What are you trying to fix right now?

Maybe we do not need to be quick. Maybe we need to be patient. Maybe in this time of patience we may see and experience the ways of God in very powerful and new ways. AMEN.

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