

Second Sunday in Advent
December 10, 2017

Text: 2 Peter 3:8-14

Theme: "Slow?"

The passage of time can be slow or fast. We know how it is not to have enough time, too much packed into one day. It's like we are barreling down a busy highway weaving in and out of traffic. It all can be very stressful. Are we too slow for the pace? Are we trying to can it around in a runners world? On the other hand time can pass very slowly. The pace of life has slowed for us temporarily or on a more permanent basis. How do we fill our days? Maybe we have too much time on our hands to worry. We lean on our canes and anxiously wonder about tomorrow.

We could be waiting anxiously for one particular day, that day when the hospital stay or the incarceration term ends. We will be released. We may be longing for that long anticipated day to arrive, say graduation, or the wedding day, or the birth of the child, or the beginning of vacation, or retirement, or Christmas. That time can just drag on as that day can't arrive quickly enough. We are like a child counting the days till Christmas. It can all be harder when we don't know the exact day of that big event. The days go on and it all seems delayed.

We are in the second Sunday in Advent. We are waiting for our Lord to arrive. He's been here already. He finished that mission and is at the right hand of the Father reigning. He returns, has promised. But when? It's been a long time, seems a really, really long time. Is God slow?

Some seemed to be saying so already in the time of our text. It's the late apostolic age. The missionary journeys of Paul probably have been completed. His writings are

known and used, even equated with Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). In 1 Peter we know Paul is addressing believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asian and Bithynia. It's probably the same recipients as we read of in 1 Peter, "This is now the second letter I am writing" (2 Peter 3:1). It has to be before the year 68. We believe that was the year Peter was crucified. It is safe to say Peter and his hearers are earnestly anticipating and eager for the return of the Lord Jesus.

Meanwhile there are false teachers and scoffers, some maybe one and the same. Peter speaks of those who have secretly brought in heresies, even denying the Master who bought them (2:1). He says, 'many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.' (2:2) Who were these deceivers? Peter says of them that it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them (2:21). He said they were promising freedom but they themselves were slaves [to the passions of the flesh] (2:18, 19). Not unreasonable to think they were advocating some form of sexual freedom. Peter describes them as waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. (2:17)

Meanwhile the truth was being taught that the time of judgment was coming. Peter points out that as God did not spare the angels who rebelled, nor did He spare the sinful world in the days of Noah, or Sodom and Gomorrah, He would not spare the ungodly (2:4-6). And the response by some was, 'Oh, really? Where's the fire?' "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." (3:4) 'So maybe God was preoccupied, had lost track of time. People continued to marry and be given in marriage. The sun continued to rise and set, the rain continued to fall. There was planting and harvest and

the seasons continued as had always been the case. So why would the unchanging cycle change? Maybe the Almighty is a bit slow. We'll just continue on our way, thank you.'

And all that scoffing was going on a long time ago. Of course this year was the big deal year about the Reformation, 500 years ago. I believe there is evidence in Luther's writings that he didn't think it would be long before the Lord returned. That was five centuries ago. We are fast approaching 2000 years since our Lord's ascension when those men staring up into the sky were told He would return in the same way He had gone (Acts 1:11). Where is He? Does the ever increasing span even tempt us away from the longing "when" to the shaky "if?"

The Ancient of Days is not getting any younger. Has God slowed? Is he like a grandfather walking with a cane who has lost a step or two? Is he also like a grandfather who just lets a lot of things slide? The scoffers have grown louder and bolder. They might say he's beyond the walker, or even wheelchair. He's on life support merely propped up by wishful thinking. Surely Christianity is about to breath its last and there will be more freedom for all!

This is the world we live in. God is blasphemed often. God has not avenged Himself because He is indeed that is slow, slow to anger. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some account slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish." (3:9) "Slow to anger" is part of God's nature, part of His revealing Himself to Moses. We read in Exodus 34, "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Words about this slowness of God are repeated throughout the OT including Jonah's complaint about it when he wanted to see

some fire poured out on Nineveh (Jonah 4:2). God waits for His Word to be taken out and bear the intended fruit.

What if God were not slow this way? What if He were quick to execute justice? It could have been over in the Garden. We have heard and may even say when asked how we are, “Better than I deserve.” What if God suddenly acted on that truth? What if the Shepherd grew tired of rounding up strays and reasoned He had enough to look after? Imagine there was no more messengers sent out on the highways and the byways for the Father judges, “Looks like a big enough bunch for a decent wedding feast?” What if the Shepherd had returned just before Peter was fastening to the cross, or on October 11, 1492, or October 30, 1517, or on December 14, 1955? The fact is He doesn’t return according to our time table.

No, God is not slow in time. The vastness of time and space is not a problem for God. God is not slowed, nor slow, never a cripple. He puts The Flash to shame. How fast is The Flash? I think he’s as fast as he wants to be and needs to be, maybe even faster than the flash of this light, so fast as to give the illusion of being in two places at once? This is no problem, no illusion for the omnipresent God. He makes the Flash look like Grandpa caning down the lane beside Usain Bolt.

God is not limited by time, one day or a thousand years, it’s all the same for Him. Is time, like everything else, a part of His creation? The cosmos operates according to His timing through the years following creation. The plan of salvation unfolds following His schedule. His people were waiting for millennia for the coming of the Coming One. There was joyful expectation and eagerness. There was also fatigue and weariness. The prophets continue to reveal more and then for 400 years nothing.

Then suddenly, there's John crying out that it's time, the Mightier One comes, the axe to the roots and the winnowing fork in His hand. And then one day the shout, "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. The Eternal One comes into time at just the right time. He lives the perfect life of righteousness and offers Himself as the perfect and complete sacrifice for our unrighteousness. God doesn't let sin slide. He bears the penalty Himself in His Son. He shows the perfect defeat of death by His resurrection. He rules over all for the sake of His church as the message goes out, the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name. It's still happening because God is patient.

He's waiting. He's waiting for more repentance and faith. We are called to daily repent. Daily as we wait we remember that the old man has been drowned and dies that the new man might emerge and live before God in righteousness and purity forever. The first day of the rest of that forever is today. Today we feed on His promises so we might continue to grow in holiness and godliness in joyful expectation and eagerness. We serve so there is more repenting and faith among those we are serving. God longs for more to cry out, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The serving continues today and tomorrow until the full number is brought in. Only God knows that day.

The horn will blow at last. Time will expire; game over. It happens with a "roar" Peter tells us (vs 10), maybe a flash and a boom. As the lightning comes from the east and shows to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:27) The trumpet will sound (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). That roar, would that be the sound of the heavens rending wide and rolling up like a scroll? But not the only sound, the sound of voices, those shrieks and cries through the gnashing of teeth in the outer darkness, and the voices in eternal praise and joyful feasting.

No, God is not slow in keeping His promises. We and this world are not here forever. We are exhorted not to presume on the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience for His kindness is meant to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4). What sort of people ought we to be—holy and pious as those who have gone from no people to God's people, those walking in His ways and giving an answer for the hope that is in us. For Jesus' sake. Amen