

Waiting Well/  
Reading from the New Testament: 2 Peter 3:8-15a

Ever so carefully, twisting and contorting your shape as if you were playing *Twister*, you navigate your way through the treacherous shoals of anxious diners waiting for a table at the audaciously hip new restaurant, all the while hoping to make it to the hostess stand without wearing some dude's mohito just so that you can ask the all-important question, "How long is the wait tonight?"

So, what's your number, as in the number of minutes/hours you are willing to wait for a coveted table? What's your tolerance for hanging out with the 200 people crammed in a foyer made for 10? 20 minutes? 45 minutes? An hour and a half? Everybody has a number and very often those numbers are not the same. Are you the one bolting for the exit if the hostess says 10 minutes? Or, if the hostess says 45 minutes, maybe you are the logical one who says, "Well, by the time we get back to the car and drive to another restaurant it will have been at least that long." Yeah, that's logical, but who's logical when it comes to food?

So, what's your number, as in the number of minutes/hours you are willing to wait for a coveted table? When I asked that our Bible study this week, the best answer was from someone who said, "How long will I wait? Depends on who I'm with." There's some wisdom in that. Think about it, "It's bad enough I have to eat with you, I'm not adding a half hour to the torture."

How long will you wait? Have you ever been to Southpark on a Friday night, not to eat necessarily, but to just buy some socks or something? Well, if you enter the mall over by the Cheesecake Factory, you will inevitably encounter a huge crowd spilling out of the restaurant. They are everywhere, leaning against walls, sitting on benches and curbs, chins resting on their palms, moss growing on their backs, as if they've been out there waiting for their name to be called since Nixon was in office. I don't know, but I'm thinking that had better be some amazing cheesecake, because they could have baked their own cheesecake, watched a movie, and finished their Christmas shopping before they put their fork in a slice of *The Factory's* finest on a night like that.

Do you consider patience to be a virtue or a disability? *The Right Stuff* was televised Wednesday night, a great movie chronicling the journey of those first pilots competing to become astronauts. One of the tests in their tryout involved sitting in a sealed environment while the scientists monitored their reactions to an increasingly stressful environment. After some thirty hours in the chamber, Gordon Cooper, played by Dennis Quaid, pretended to be taking a nap while the other candidate was having a nervous breakdown following the blaring of a siren. In fact, Cooper even slyly grinned when the nurse peeked through the window, sort of like *Hey, I'm chill*.

For you, is patience a virtue or a liability? For what are you willing to wait? And for how long? In our text for today, Peter is addressing a community that could possibly look as pitiful as those long-suffering cheesecake lovers out at Southpark. The audience for this letter is probably a generation or two removed from the lives of Jesus and his disciples; the letter probably having been composed by a student of Peter's writing in the apostle's name. Jesus had intimated and the earliest disciples had believed that Jesus' return was imminent. After all, it was Jesus who said, "Truly I tell you, some who are

standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Yet, some 40-50 years later, here is a whole crowd of folks still waiting for their table at the Kingdom Diner.

Is he ever going to get here? You know the feeling. Waiting for a parent to pick you up after basketball practice or the blind date to show up at the agreed upon meeting spot or the caterer to show up for the event that was supposed to start 10 minutes ago. Are they ever going to get here? You're squinting to identify every lonely pair of headlights coming down the road. "Is that..., could it be...? And the car passes on by, fraying yet another 20% of your remaining nerves. Is he ever going to get here?

When preparing for a memorial service or a wedding, invariably the next of kin or the couple will ask what time they need to tell participants to be there, and over the years I've learned to tell them something like, "Listen, you know yourself and you know these folks. We need to be ready to go fifteen minutes before the service, but feel free to tell the habitually tardy folks I need them here an hour beforehand." That's good planning, right? Not really, because it doesn't

usually work. The perpetually late shall be perpetually late. I think it must be a law of physics.

Will he ever get here? Jesus had promised Peter and the disciples, “if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself.” The author of Revelation envisions the kingdom Christ would usher in: Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them ... ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Sounds great, but is it real?

Peter shares what other voices in the community were pointing out to members of the church: "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" Of course, the same argument would seem relevant still today in light of the state of world affairs – wars and rumors of nuclear apocalypse; the craven quest for power and riches at the expense of the vulnerable and poor; the dissembling of the common good; the buffoonery of men in the workplace, on the movie set, in the halls of power – "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since

our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!"

So, Peter seeks to answer two questions in our text today – 1) Why is it taking so long for Christ to return? 2) If he is coming eventually, what are we supposed to do in the meantime?

To the first question, Peter reflects on a verse from Psalm 90, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. **9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” It’s senseless for limited, finite human beings to quibble about time with the author of eternity. The African American spiritual states it plainly. When talking about God, “He may not come when you want, but he’ll be there right on time.” And look at the reason for what we perceive to be God’s procrastination. “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” What we assume to be God’s tardiness is actually God’s mercy. How many times in life were you aggravated because you thought you were ready for some challenge, but were prevented from pursuing it. And it’s only

years later that you realize you wouldn't have been prepared for it after all. That challenge would have chewed you up and spit you out. Those are the epiphanies that will send you to your knees in gratitude for disasters averted. God isn't slow, God is patient, and God doesn't want anyone to miss the party. What we perceive to be God's slowness turns out to be the best news you'll find in the Bible: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

So yes, Peter tells us, it is worth the wait. Okay then, what are we supposed to be doing in the meantime? This is the second question Peter addresses. "What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ... we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. 14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."

Holy and godly lives ... spotless, blameless, and at peace. Sounds kind of intimidating if you ask me. I may be needing more of God's patience than I thought. Take your time, God! Take your time! No hurry! No worry! So, knowing we have more spots than a kid with a bad case of chicken pox and knowing we are lathered up with enough blame

to butter a billion biscuits, what are we to be doing out here in the anteroom of God's great banquet? You know what to do. You know what to do and I know you know what to do. Last week Jessica, in a stroke of sheer brilliance, found a way to fully draw you fully into the experience of prayer. A simple prayer on a *Post-It Note*. What a glorious tapestry of prayer you produced. If you weren't here or if you haven't seen the sea of yellow post-its adorning the artful posters created by our youth, take the time and tour the tapestry of prayer.

Well folks, I read those prayers and what struck me was the fact that you know precisely what we need to be doing in light of the grace of Jesus Christ and the promise of the kingdom of God. You know. You spoke of the desire to be present to hints of God's kingdom all around us and particularly present to the people in your lives. You spoke of wanting to step off the out of control treadmill of cultural definitions of success; wanting to slow down and reset your priorities; wanting to do more listening than showing off; wanting to express more gratitude than grievance; and perhaps most importantly, wanting the needs of others to take precedence over your wants and preferences.

Consider this prayer that you'll find on display. "The Divine is at the center of everything ... Seek justice for those with no voice, approach all with kindness in your heart." Or how about these prayers: "Be the hands and feet of Christ to show others evidence of the existence of His abundant love." "Take time to notice God working through others to do good." "Focus on others in my life and those I meet, really see them. Pay attention to them." "God asks me to be a part of the solution to the challenges I see – whether from my family, my friends, or in the world as a whole. Be love." "I believe God is calling me to do more in the service to help needy people in our community." There were prayers for patience, for the capacity to pay attention to the presence of God, for the energy to work for peace, for the will to end homelessness, particularly in light of the 5000 homeless children in Charlotte's school system.. Prayers to slow down and simplify.

You know what God wants us to be as we wait here in the confusing, cramped, of confounding, and always chaotic anteroom of heaven's banquet. You know it and more importantly, you want to be the person God created you to be in this world as we await the new heaven and new earth. Sure, the wait may be longer than we thought,

but look around and see the community, the faces God has given us to share the time with. Surely, it's worth the wait. Amen.