

B Advent 01

30 November 2008

Isaiah 64.4; 1 Cor 1.9 RCL

A God Who Works For Those Who Wait For Him

We human beings spend a large portion of our lives waiting, some of us patiently, others of us with scarcely contained restlessness to get on with it, whatever “it” might be. Sometimes the things we wait for are momentous – the kiss of a lover, the birth of a child, the passing of a storm, the election of a president – and sometimes our anticipation is just for the mundane – the stoplight to turn green, shower water to turn warm, the neighbors to get quiet. For the past two weeks I’ve been waiting out a cold, waiting for it to run its course of runny nose, aching muscles, lack of energy. I’ve wanted to get on with things, but run out of energy when I do. At 64 I have to wait on things that I used to bull through when I was 24.

Waiting is a sign of the kind of creatures we are, composed of spirit and matter, subject to space and time. Time, that everyday reality that mystifies scientists and philosophers, as well as ourselves – we hold our being, our existence, in a piecemeal fashion; we have only this present moment; the past is gone; the future not yet arrived.

Theologians tell us that God does not exist in time, that God holds His entire reality in a never-ending present, that time is a construct of the universe which God has created. Part of the meaning of the incarnation of God into a Baby in Bethlehem is that God consented to be restricted by time as we are, to know ourselves as incomplete, to be patient as we experience moment to moment the wonder of the unfolding universe, to be unsure and sometimes afraid of what we are waiting for, to long for the assurance that all will be well. Part of the meaning of the Christmas Emmanuel is that God is with us, that with God-in-Jesus we see

ourselves as we are and as we shall be. Jesus is irrelevant if He is not human, and Jesus is irrelevant if He is not divine. I belong to Jesus and He belongs to me precisely because we are both human; I see in Him the same course of life that I see in myself; because of that unity, I am comforted and I am strengthened. But because Jesus also is God, is united in a unique fashion to the Divinity that transcends all creation, Jesus leads me into a reality that is completely beyond my slight humanity. Because of Jesus, God has destined each of us for a life of glory completely beyond our imagining.

It's just that we have to wait for it. As Jesus lived through a human life and experienced a human death, so we do the same, but in the knowledge that our life and death are taken up into the reality that is Jesus. And because God resurrected Jesus into a new and greater life than He had known on earth, we are destined to the same resurrection, the same transformation into an unimaginable joy and love.

Because of Jesus and His waiting, we can see our waiting in a new light, not as time lost but as time redeemed. Each moment possesses a magnificence of its own that will never come again. Waiting in the grocery store is not time irretrievable but a chapter in the wonderful saga of a human life, yours and mine. It is part of what God prizes in the universe, the unique moment that will never be repeated but that is treasured and savored by God. That is why She has gifted His creatures with eternal life, so that their moment-to-moment experiences will be gathered up and last forever.

Our Christian spirituality tells us that our waiting is not just an amorphous fog but that it rather has a focus, God Himself, and more particularly God Himself in Jesus Christ. We not only wait *for* but we wait *on* God. Just as hosts wait on guests, servants wait on employers, waiters wait on diners, so we wait on God. We have work to do. Our work is not our own, does not take its meaning from ourself. Rather it is

God's work and takes its meaning from God. Your life and mine, mundane and perhaps boring, is not about being only human; it is about carrying a divine charge that transforms the passing-away into the eternal.

How does that change our lives? I think it means that nothing and no one is unimportant. If we saw our lives as God sees them, as some of the saints have seen them, we would realize the import of our every breath, smile, word, movement, thought, sigh. No moment is a throw-away, no person is a nothing. It is all radically important, significant, and crucial.

But for Christians the really interesting thing, I think, is that not only do we wait on the divine, but that the divine waits on us. Hear again that breath-taking sentence from today's *Isaiah* reading: "From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eyes has seen any God [like] you, *who works for those who wait for him.*" (64.4) Amazing – God works for those who wait for Him. Do you wait for God? Then God works for you. Saint Paul in our *First Corinthians* reading says it more simply: "God is faithful." (1.9) God never fails, God is always there, God is always at work. And all for you and me and for all that God has made and loves.

We indeed are servants – of God and of Her creation – but God is also a servant. God is a servant within Himself, a Trinity of Persons that are eternally focused on the Others, Persons that eternally give Themselves to the Others. God also serves the requirements of Her universe, and we see that especially in the servanthood of Jesus. Emmanuel, God-with-us, views us with a regard and importance that calls out His own nature of caring. So God lives with us, dies with us, resurrects us into newness that we cannot imagine – all because God cannot bear to lose one moment of the glory She has created. That is why our destiny is so assured, because it is based on the nature and desire of God Himself. Ultimately, what God wants, God gets. And what God wants is you and

me and every moment of every human life. That is what salvation is all about.

The Church has a four-week season devoted to the theme of waiting. It is, of course, Advent, Latin for “coming.” Advent is about waiting for the coming of God in Jesus, once long ago in Bethlehem, once far in the future at the end of time, and in the infinity of moments that constitutes the course of our lives and the history of our universe.

Trust in Him who is faithful and who works for those who wait for Him. Amen.