

# What We Are Waiting For: Wholeness

**TEXT:**  
**Psalm 72:1-7**  
**Isaiah 11:1-10**  
**Romans 15:1-14**

December 9, 2007

**A**s we wait and anticipate during this season of Advent, we continue to ponder the question, “What are we waiting for?” This week, we are waiting for wholeness, and our Scripture lessons this morning give us a wide array of visions of brokenness and restoration within the lives of God’s people.

In these texts I hear wholeness in the language of living “in harmony with one another.”<sup>i</sup> I see wholeness in the imagery of creation restored to its original design with the wolf, lamb, leopard, lion, snake, and child all living together without threat of danger or fear.<sup>ii</sup> I understand God’s intention for all God’s children – chosen and born of Abraham or chosen and adopted in Christ – to set aside differences and worship God together with one united voice.<sup>iii</sup> And I hear myself crying with the Psalmist to make it so, praying that God will bring justice to all (both rich and poor, influential and powerless) and praying that God will bring righteousness to leaders and the people alike (leaders who must be righteous – that is, in right relationship with God – and set the example for people who, in turn, nurture right relationships within their own lives).<sup>iv</sup>

I hear and see and understand these things, and I find myself longing for the wholeness that

seems to be before the eyes of God’s people for millennia – from the prayers of the Psalmist, to the prophecies of Isaiah, to the writings of Paul. And I wait, looking around and thinking to myself, surely this – this modern age – is not the fulfillment of God’s wholeness made complete on earth. Surely this is not the return to Paradise, the return to Eden foretold by Isaiah, where everyone gets along and comes together and, as one, lives and worships and exists in harmony with each other, with the land, with the animals, and above all with the Lord.

And so I wait. We wait. We read the lessons of Advent. We look to Christmas. We look to the next coming of Christ, and we wait for what seems an eternity before the withered stump becomes a beautiful, strong tree spreading its branches over all the earth with blessings of shade and fruit and roots that run deep.

It’s an incredible image of hope that the prophet gives us in today’s lesson, so incredible that Paul recalls it again in his letter almost 800 years later. “A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse ... [and it] shall stand as a signal to the peoples.”<sup>v</sup> The peoples – not just the people (singular) of Israel, but the peoples (plural), all the nations of the world who will see this One rise, ruling with deep rooted hope and strength over all by the grace of God. “The root of Jesse

shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles.”<sup>vi</sup> The roots, going deep, the shoots spreading out will reach beyond a limited population and encompass all the earth, all the people. Divisions between Jews and Gentiles, divisions of any kind that hinder us from complete relationships – from whole relationships – will wither, as God’s children are united in harmony and as a whole, as a single voice, praise their God who restores what was once broken to health and life and peace.

So what are we waiting for? We are waiting for wholeness. And we are still waiting. In fact, if we listen carefully to the words of the prophet, we will continue to wait for a while. “On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal for all peoples; all nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.”<sup>vii</sup> On that day. This is a phrase often used by the prophet Isaiah to point to a distant future.<sup>viii</sup> This is a not a vision of completeness that will be realized in the blink of a human eye with a little wishful thinking and a sudden thunderbolt of a miracle from heaven. This is a glorious vision, one of all the nations “inquiring after him”, meaning that all the people of the earth will go to Jerusalem, will look toward Jerusalem, and seek the Word of the Lord.<sup>ix</sup> This is a grand idea that all of creation will be restored and at its heart will be God, ruling over the

world from the holy dwelling, Jerusalem, at the heart of it all.<sup>x</sup> For Isaiah, this is an “end of days” notion that can only come about in the very end.

Last week, Kent read from Matthew’s little apocalypse. I’m sorry to tell you, if you thought this week was going to get a whole lot better, a whole lot nicer, a whole lot more “Christmasy” with the happy images and the nostalgia and the easy, familiar stories, we’re not there yet.

With the start of a new Christian year, we’ve cycled into a new lectionary year. We’re back to the beginning, to Year A in the lectionary cycle, and the beginning is awfully concerned with the end. The Alpha and the Omega. The all encompassing nature of God that completes us. And we aren’t complete until we’ve passed from beginning through the fullness of our lives to the end and seen with wonder the glories that lie beyond.

The visions we see, the harmonies we hear, the wholeness we wait for, according to the prophet, comes “on that day” far from now when creation comes full circle from goodness through fall to restoration, the broken pieces put back together and all the world made whole as God once again draws us so close to Him that we can hear our Lord’s footsteps walking in the garden<sup>xi</sup> or wandering up the street.

So what does that do for us now? If what I’m saying holds any water and the wholeness we all long for is in the distant future of “that day” (whether we long for it aloud like the Psalmist in his prayer or in our hearts like Paul who writes beseechingly to his

church to get along) what’s the point?

I think we hear the answer in Paul’s letter to the church at Rome and see, through Paul’s words, that the Psalmist’s prayer has been answered, that Isaiah’s prophecy is coming true, and that we are the key to realizing the glory of the heavenly kingdom here on earth.

Paul sets out five key tasks in this text for those who will hear.

- Listen to what was written in the days of old. Those writings are for our instruction.<sup>xii</sup>

- Live in harmony with each other. The common goal is to glorify God.<sup>xiii</sup>

- Welcome one another. This includes those who know everything, those who know nothing, those who look like me, those who look like you, and everyone in between.<sup>xiv</sup>

- Glorify God. This one’s not redundant. It’s the point of the whole thing.<sup>xv</sup>

- Be filled with hope, joy, and peace in believing. We find this strength through the Holy Spirit.<sup>xvi</sup>

It sounds like a simple enough list, but we all know it’s not quite that easy.

- There are days when we just can’t quiet the voices of scientific reason, syllogistic logic, or plain ol’ modern common sense and take seriously the writings of the Scriptures. They’re just too fantastic or farfetched. So we wait for “that day” when the unimaginable will fall into our laps.

- We all know people we just can’t deal with. More days than not, they rub us the wrong way. Their politics make no sense. They grate on our last nerve. Dissonance would better

describe the tone of our relationship than harmony, and it’s just too hard to make it work right now. So we wait for “that day” when someone else will fix the relationship for us.

- There are days when we are really good at welcoming the new faces that walk into our church or smiling at the random person on Mass. or at the grocery store. But there are other days when we just don’t have the energy or desire, and so we avert our eyes, keeping our heads down, making sure we’re looking anywhere but their direction. Or we hustle by looking harassed and busy. “So sorry. Can’t stop. I’m in a hurry to do this important thing.” So we wait for “that day” when we have more time and energy and a better attitude.

- We want to glorify God, when have the right words for the song or the proper words for the prayer. We want to offer praise, when we have more time in our day or a quiet moment alone or a better opportunity or more to be thankful for or less to whine about. So we wait for “that day” when the words come and the time is right.

- There are days, or at least moments, when we feel the tug of something that points us toward hope, joy, and even peace of mind and heart. But then we look around us, read the paper, watch the news, or sit in traffic too long. Then the voice, the tug, the Spirit, the something gets silenced, and we get frustrated, anxious, angry – the opposites of hopeful, joyful, and peaceful. So we wait for “that day” when the cares are gone and everything falls perfectly into place.

So we wait; and we wait; and we wait; and we wait for that day. And suddenly – though it

sounded nuts a few minutes ago to suggest that we wait for the end of our lives to realize the glory of God and the Kingdom of Christ all around us – we realize its almost over, and maybe, just maybe, we’ve waited too long to pick up the pieces, put them all together, and realize the whole life, the complete life, of friends and family and faith that God has laid before us to work with and live through.

Never does Scripture point to an easy task, and we can attest to this truth in our own experience. Never are the simple stories so simple nor all the moments and endings happy. But Paul tells us if we rely on the words of the prophet we might, with a little effort, hear the prayer of the Psalmist answered. Looking to the One we anticipate again this Advent, looking to the Christ on whom we wait, we just might find that missing piece and with a little effort, with a little listening, with a little harmony, with a little welcoming, with a little praise, with a little hope and joy and peace, we can be made whole long before “that day”.

What are we waiting for?  
 Are we waiting for that day?  
 Are we waiting for wholeness?  
 Or are we waiting to stop waiting?

The Christ child will come among us again soon enough. When he does, will we keep waiting?

Or will we listen, live, welcome, praise, and work together in hope, joy, and peace – made whole in righteousness (in right relationship) with each other and with our God?

May the season of waiting prepare us to receive with open

hands and hearts the wholeness God offers us this day and on that day to come.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Extra-Biblical Sources (and Bible Versions)

---

i. The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version (New York: HarperCollins Publishers) 1993, Romans 15:5.

ii. Ibid., Isaiah 11:6,8.

iii. Ibid., Isaiah 11:10, Romans 15:7-9.

iv. Ibid., Psalms 72:1.

v. Ibid., Isaiah 11:1,10.

vi. Ibid., Romans 15:12.

vii. Ibid., Isaiah 11:10.

viii. David L. McKenna. The Preacher’s Commentary: Isaiah 1-39. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1993, p. 156.

ix. NRSV, *footnote* p. 1030.

x. Ibid.

xi. Ibid., Genesis 3:8.

xii. Ibid., Romans 15:4.

xiii. Ibid., Romans 15:5-6.

xiv. Ibid., Romans 15:7-9.

xv. Ibid., Rom 15:9.

xvi. Ibid., Rom 15:13.

**This sermon delivered by  
 Rev. Phyllis Stutzman  
 First Presbyterian Church  
 2415 Clinton Parkway  
 Lawrence, KS 66047**