

Peter writes, “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?” In other words, knowing how this is all going down is going to affect your living today. It’s going to make you a different sort of person. Not a fearful person – that’s not what Peter says. But a person who lives in the light of the knowledge of God’s wonderful and wondrous promise. Sin (the unsolvable problem of the world) is going to be fully and finally burned out.

Peter goes on, “You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” Not fear but anticipation. Not cowering in a bunker with canned beans but showing forth a different way of being in light of a future reality. He goes on, “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”

In the 1646, just ten years before the plague would rip through England, the Westminster divines gathered to compose one of the greatest statements of faith the world has ever known – the Westminster Confession. And the fourth question of the catechism asks this: “What is God?” And the answer: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.”

Do you believe that? Because if you believe that then God’s apparent slowness has to be good news somehow. So often we find ourselves faced with a problem. And we conclude that either God is absent, or God is incompetent. Because I’m asking and he’s not doing. And what I’m asking for is logical and practical and necessary – so get on with it!

But in reality, God is right on time. Imagine if you could rest in that assurance? Imagine when the test results come back and it’s not good news, imagine when the moment feels perilous and hopeless and nothing seems to be happening, imagine when you aren’t sure how you’re going to get yourself out of this mess, you could whisper to your heart, “God is right on time.”

When things don’t seem to be going according to plan – even those plans that you believe will bring glory to God – you can rest in the truth that “the Lord is at hand.” Why? Because he is faithful. And all who wait patiently for him are happy (Isaiah 30:18). God knows exactly what he is doing. He will accomplish his purposes, in his way at just the right time. And he always keeps his word.

And, if God is never late, well, then I can wait. Can you say that with me? “If God is never late, then I can wait.

I know there are some in our midst today who feel overlooked by God. There are some who have been in a season of waiting too long. There are some who feel abandoned.

He sees you. He will not fail to be faithful to his purposes in your life. The one who invented time is never behind schedule. And in that glorious truth is the power to face anything. Even waiting.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

“Right on Time: Wait for It”

January 14th, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: 2 Peter 3:1-13

By Rev. Mike Putnam

The Christian message is a bit of a hard sell in our time. Getting all excited about a faith which holds back its main benefit until after you die is pretty hard to get people excited about today.

Now, certainly people who follow Jesus will experience a myriad of advantages in this life, don’t get me wrong. And we can back those advantages up with all kinds of studies that have shown that people of faith are generally happier, and live longer, and are better equipped to deal with life’s inevitable challenges. And families of faith are stronger and children who grow up with faithful parent’s do better in school and in life and on and on and on it goes. But that’s not what our faith is all about. Those are just side benefits.

Jesus did not come to earth as God incarnate to live and die and be resurrected to glory so that we could all feel a little better. No Jesus came on a great rescue mission – to make a way where there was no way before. Jesus came because there was no other way. There was no other way for us to be in right relationship with God – there was no other way to defeat the power of death and evil. It was a desperate situation.

Jesus was God’s last-ditch answer and the only hope of one day restoring creation and saving it from the powers of sin, death and evil.

But the new creation – the new heaven and earth that will one day replace this one which is forever contaminated by sin – is not here yet. We’re still waiting. We’re still hoping. We’re still praying.

And so, the main benefit of following Jesus – the restoration of all things

and the forgiveness of sins and a heavenly body restored without pain or blemish, and a restored life lived in a creation glorified by God...well, you’re just going to have to wait.

But messages of denial now for gain later don’t sell very well. We’re all for living it up now. We’re a credit society. We’re in a rush to get to the next best thing – so we speed through conversations, our thoughts, our to-do lists, our decisions, our favorite Netflix series, our meals, and ultimately our lives because we’re all in a rush to get somewhere else.

And woe to those who casually doddle through airports in front of us or who have the audacity to drive the speed limit on highway 41. Because we’re in a hurry! We have places to be, a life to live, and the next thing to get to.

And so, delayed gratification will never bring a cheer from the crowd. How many advertisements have it as their basic strategy to convince us that you can only have it today and not tomorrow. “Act fast.” “Hurry, you don’t want to miss out”. And while you’re at it, “Buy 2 for the price of 1.” But I don’t need two! Well, buy now and you’ll save!!!

And we have age old wisdom that enshrines this kind of “now” centred thinking. “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” “Strike while the iron is hot.” “Carpe Diem – Seize the day.”

When I worked in the business world, I saw this kind of thinking every month. It may surprise you that most businesses are not all that focussed on long-term financial health. They’re mostly driven by short-term targets. Everyone wants to

make their bonus this month.

The amount of pressure that was brought on the sales team to hit monthly and yearly targets was huge. And it resulted in a very different kind of mindset. It made building those long-term relationships too time consuming to bother with, because what I needed was a sale this month.

But that's part of our human nature. We're all like this...it's not just big businesses and children at Christmastime who want what they want now. If we're honest, we want it too. Nothing is more irritating to us that slow service at a restaurant. Nothing gets under our skin like a repairman that doesn't show up on time. Nothing is so inconvenient as a delivery that takes more than a day or two to arrive.

Imagine an ad that says, "You deserve a break...in a few years when you've saved up and can afford to book off time without causing too much of a disruption to your family and work commitments." No, that wouldn't be effective at all. The powerful slogan is "you deserve a break today! Now! Don't delay!"

And so, I ask you, how can a society like this get excited about the Christian message? Don't we get more from going out for Sunday brunch and enjoying a great meal? Don't we get more from playing sports or doing some recreational activity on a Sunday morning?

Well, it turns out our "fast food culture" isn't that new. It turns out the apostle Peter, two thousand years ago, was writing to a group of people who believed, in some sense, that things would just carry on forever as they always have, that Christ would probably never return, and that judgment was nothing to worry about. And who were living accordingly.

And it is here that we find both another problem of time (God's apparent

slowness) and an opportunity of time (living in the urgency of God's slow time).

And what Peter wants believers to know is that we shouldn't take God's time for granted. We shouldn't just assume that God's judgment is far off in the future and live accordingly. No, there is in fact an urgency to the reality of God's timing even as time seems to drag on.

He writes about "scoffers" saying, "But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of waters and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly."

And what Peter is referring to is creation and the great flood of the Old Testament. He is reminding readers that God was very patient, but God's patience had an expiry date. And one day God wiped it all out in judgement.

God's faithfulness is described in scripture as reaching to the skies (Psalm 36:5); as an all-surrounding reality unique to him (Psalm 89:8); and as a shield we can take refuge under (Psalm 91:4). The Bible reminds us that God's faithfulness endures forever to all generations. But part of God's faithfulness is that he does what he says he will do.

Sometimes people object to the violence found in the Old Testament. God seems vengeful and angry. And yet, those times when God brings catastrophe on the Canaanites or on Sodom and Gomora it is following a tremendous period of patience, of calling them to repentance from their wicked living that was so bad it would make your hair curl. That God waited so long is astounding.

Next Peter explains time in terms of God's time. He says, "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. 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."

So, in other words, God's slowness is missional. Think of Jesus himself. Jesus appears to never be in a hurry. As a boy he spent days in the temple listening. As a teacher he taught slowly with lessons that never seemed to get to the point (at least not the way his disciples wanted). He would disappear for days to pray, and he meandered through back roads and off-the-beaten-path byways to encounter the strangest group of misfits. I mean, come on Jesus, we have a world to save here! Could you pick up the pace and get on with it.

But Jesus' slow-paced ministry was the point. He was gathering the most unlikely suspects to be part of his Father's family. He was showing and sharing the love of God and showing God's power in the small things. And he continues to do that today.

Why doesn't Jesus return? Apparently because there are some who are yet to be counted in the family. That's what Peter says. He's patiently gathering all who will yet come – maybe your children or grandchildren or great grandchildren?

Historian Alan Kreider makes the case in his book *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, that one of the essential virtues of the early church was patience. Since God was patient, and Jesus embodied patience, the early church determined that "they, trusting in God, should also be patient – not controlling events, not anxious or in a hurry, and never using force to achieve their ends." That was the outcome of an

unhurried group of people modelled in the way of Jesus. A non-violent, non-aggressive movement that loved radically and served graciously.

But we shouldn't take God's slowness for granted. We shouldn't treat God like a benign old man who totters around and can't seem to get anything done. Peter says, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare."

Well, that escalated quickly! We've gone from God's slowness and gentleness, his tolerance and patience to the very elements being burned up in fire. Why such a severe way of dealing with the problem?

Oh, but you see, this is where we underestimate the problem. Sin is not just some bad choices we've made. It's not just a little lie here and a little unkind word there. No sin is what is wrong with the world. Sin is the disease that has infected us all – we all have it. And it will be our destruction – unless we are saved from its destructive power.

I'm reminded of the plague in England in the 1600's. It swept through London killing more than 75,000 people in one year. It seemed that it would go on killing everyone, but eventually it was stopped. Stopped by a vaccine? By herd immunity? No, it was stopped by fire. A great and terrible fire spread throughout the city, and it burned out the plague.

But you see, the motivation here isn't fear. Don't misunderstand. And I know, some of you have sat under preaching that used texts like these to instill fear. But just because there is a bad doctor you shouldn't write off all medical science. This text is not about fear. It's about opening your eyes to God's time and timing.