

Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 24:42-44; Romans 13:11,12
Advent 1, Year A

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WAITING FOR SALVATION

A **Waiting room**..... is a misnomer. They shouldn't be called that. They should be called **holding areas or holding cells**....or dead zones.

They are places to go to kill time, and not only is that a terrible state of being – “killing time”, but they are not places to “wait.”

Waiting, especially in the Biblical sense, does not mean being idle. Waiting suggests “waiting for something” with the innuendo of anticipation, and generally, when we anticipate something, we prepare for it. Waiting includes making ready.

Waiting is NOT being detained, being a captive or being held. Too often, we find ourselves confined / trapped, ...forced to lose a portion of our lives. Doing nothing, “killing time” is destructive / counterproductive.... it is being frozen. It is not living; it is dying.

Farmers wait for harvest to begin, and their waiting is filled with getting ready. Football players wait for the game to start by trying to get into the “zone”, by loosening up and warming their muscles for the game.

Think of “waiting” as a preparation episode ... done in anticipation. Advent is a season of waiting—a season of readying.

Being idle, killing time is NOT waiting. IT IS Wasting....wasting away.

The New Testament church was expecting the parousia / the second coming of Christ / the fulfillment to happen at any moment.

Yet, as Paul noted, they were NOT waiting for it. They were not preparing; they were sitting on their hands. In other words they were busy dying / doing nothing, instead of living in hopeful, active preparation.

From our Romans 13 passage, Paul implores them to “wake up”.... because.. ... “Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.”

Pauls understands salvation as a process, and not a one time deal.

Many people want to regard “salvation” as a single event with a guarantee. And, they often used the language of “saved” and “lost” or them and us, and it mutates to.... good guy/ bad guy, Christian and heathen,,,,,and so on.

That thinking devalues Jesus to merely a ransom paid / a get out of jail pass. Jesus lived and taught salvation as a way of being / living with God and creation, and that is what Paul preached, too.

We are living / in process. Our salvation becomes clearer when we become a believer, when we accept Jesus as the saviour—accepting his teachings and examples.

However, in my case, I did that when I was young. It was a pivotal moment, but it was just one episode in my life.

I've changed. I'm not the same person as I was then,.... life is in progress.... and so is salvation.

Therefore, we need to be “awake” / we must constantly be engaged in being saved. Waiting changes with every day.

This way of understanding doesn't mean anyone has lost their ticket to heaven.

God's love is pretty big, and those who are busy waiting for the wholeness of creation..... are busy living, and thus being saved.

Life with God / following Christ / “Salvation” is NOT stagnant.

And, we have more pressing matters, right now, to attend to, than to focus only on what happens in *the here after*.

We can trust our destiny to God so that we can dwell on being alive.

Jesus, in Matthew 24, presents the same warning: “keep awake” – be diligent in preparation as you wait.

His Cryptic message about the “coming of the Son of Man”, at an unknown time,.... was intended to inspire his believers to be ever active as they wait..... for the fulfilment / for God's way to be complete.

We can call that condition many things, such as the end of time, heaven orwholeness,.....and Peace means “wholeness”.

When all the world, all of creation, is one with God / living with God, being in God's way, as Jesus demonstrated,.... then that is the state of Peace,.... and it doesn't matter where or when.

Therefore,..... our salvation / our atonement – oneness with God... is a journey / a process to peace. We are waiting for that.

Isaiah presents the same message, a message to people frozen / to people not engaged in growing with God / to people not truly living in present /to people not being saved.

In chapter one, Isaiah tries to jolt them out of their slumber. He warns them to quit their old patterns.... because they no longer work/ are no longer appropriate.

Verse 11 of Chapter one states that God is tired of the sacrifices/ that God doesn't want them. God does NOT need a ransom.

Instead, as verse 17 reveals that the people should do “Good”, seek justice, rescue the oppressed and empower the weak.

And, if the people don't seek God's way, then they will be the victims of war.

In Chapter two, for those awaking, Isaiah shares encouraging words – a message to inspire active waiting in hopeful anticipation.

Today's text highlights not only what “active” waiting means, but also that the times have changed.

The people will be drawn to the “House of Yahweh”, instead of the temple. There is no inclusion of the altar, and therefore the old era of the priests and sacrifices have given way to prophetic messages.

The people will learn God’s ways / will follow God, not just comply to the laws. Isaiah does not limit learning from only the Torah. In fact, the Torah is not mentioned. Instead, instruction will come for “the word” – the word of the Lord.

Theology / the journey with God had changed. They were prodded to move beyond legalism.

Isaiah then presents a picture of world peace / of God’s justice. It is an ideal worth waiting for. And, we know that God does the saving, and likewise, it is God who brings peace.

Nevertheless, “waiting” for the peace to come / for wholeness means active preparation. Expecting God’s wholeness means we are engaged in that vision. Our wait is busy being in the salvation.

Beating swords into plowshares is altering old patterns. It is transforming the tools and the systems of destruction into instruments that cultivate / that help feed others.

If there are no swords / no weapons..... then how will nations do war?
>>Make sense.

So, are we as a people / as nation investing our resources in feeding the hungry and uplifting the powerless.....or.....are we spending our money on weapons? What direction are we going? What are we preparing for?

In addition, the text ends with the common sense parallel to abolishing weapons, and that is STOP learning to do war.

I find that statement so enjoyable and inspiring! Because it states the rarely understood obvious, which is... we have to learn to do war, therefore war is NOT natural.

The core of our spirit longs for love and peace, and not destruction and death.

If war was natural, soldiers would not suffer from Post traumatic stress disorder.

Yet sadly, we are getting better at teaching war.

During WWII and preceding wars, only 10% of “trained” soldiers would actually aim their guns and try to shoot the enemy.

During the Vietnam war, because of more enhanced “conditioning”, that trait rose to over 70%.

Today, 90% of professional soldiers aim to kill.

What are we waiting for? For what are we preparing for..... or..... are we locked in a holding pattern? Are we actively waiting for salvation / for God’s wholeness..... or are we frozen in the old ways, looking back?

Much of the impetus of having a military is to hold on / to defend what is. Living in the past, fighting to defend the faith, the traditions has the same flavour.

Isaiah presented a transforming/ new way of living with God, as did Jesus and Paul present more newness / new perspectives.

God’s way is ever blossoming love and active creation/ creativity.... which brings wholeness.

Moreover, just as the journey with God shifted away from legalism, the temple and sacrifices, to prophecy and justice living, it also radically changed when God surprised the world with a baby born 2,000 years ago, and.... the journey with God continues, and is ever new...and forward looking.

It doesn't make any sense for God to stop the progress / the changing / the constant surprise of being saved. We are being saved, therefore our unfolding salvation is happening now, and is not behind us.

When I was a teenager, my salvation journey was very fresh,.... and it was different from what I was hearing in the church.

God was not only speaking to me through the Torah and the rest of the Bible, but God was also inspiring me through music and creation.

My unfolding salvation danced with CCR, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, CSN and others. The social vibrations of revolution / radical reform with overtures of peace and love formed the cradle of my rebirth progression. And, the highlights of my spiritual refreshment came from excursions in the wilderness.

Yet, the keepers of the faith and the preachers said I was wrong. That my music was demonic, and that God can only be found in the Bible and in the organized church. In those days, revivals were the main instruments for salvation.

And, it made sense to them. They came out of the depression and the horrors of WWII. The roots of their salvation were framed in the hope for stability, safety and the restoration of what should have been.

They had honed their theology and it was working for them, therefore I had to be wrong because my "waiting" / my journey with God was different.

Unfortunately, their condemnation had a squelching affect, and it would take a number of years for me to rediscover God's Spirit calling me out.

And again, my journey of salvation included music and nature with the fanciful vision of the world embracing peace and love.

Time and progress has a weird way of changing things.

A few days ago, I bought a DVD to watch,.... since my evening were mine alone.

The DVD was of the 25th Anniversary Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Concerts that were held in Madison Square Gardens in October of 2009.

The concert included an amazing collection of artists, including James Taylor, Crosby Stills and Nash, BB King, Simon and Garfunkle, Annie Lennox, Sting, U2, Mick Jagger, Bruce Springsteen... and many more, and they paid tributes to those artists who have already died.

The performances were amazing. It all brought back so many memories. Most of the musicians I had seen in concert 30-40 years ago, and I grieved those who sadly are no more **and then it hit me.**

These guys were mostly in their sixties, representing an era in the past.

Am I now behaving as my parents generation did. Am I now part of the "keepers's of the faith" Am I proclaiming a salvation journey that was formed years and years ago.

In addition, I painful wrestled with the concept that much of my life is framed by losses and diminished expectations.

Am I holding on to what is left and defending old dreams, instead of living / waiting for the unfolding salvation that is happening in the now?

I was not having happy thoughts.
I didn't know what this meant for me or what to do about it.

The next day, as I processed the passages for today and my turmoil, I came across a wonderful quote by Wendell Berry:
"It may be that when we no longer know which way to go that we have come to our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings."

I realized, that salvation is not holding on, nor is it idly waiting to die, caressing fond memories of how things used to be.

I was forced to wrestle with the question: if God is pulling us forward, if God is still creating the new and doing surprises, am I there, too?
Am I actively engaged in waiting for God's wholeness.... or am I in a holding zone?

I want to be in the process of living / of being in preparation for God's surprise. I don't want to be in the idle, dying process.

Therefore, I do not want to build walls that hinder, and I do not want to stymie fresh journeys of rebirth.

I love the old music, yet I will carefully listen to Arcade Fire, Lady Gaga, the Mahones, Three Days Grace, The Killers, Matchbox 20, mgmt, Taylor Swift, and countless other contemporary artists.... so that I can better understand what frames the world today,.... for younger people.
I'm not suggesting that recipe for anyone else; however, my hope is to proclaim a message that also relates to today,.. and is not simply vintage 1970 or older.

Please do not think that this is a rejection of anyone's theology or of the old ways of thinking.
I'm merely stating the need to be in rebirth / of living with the new and waiting for God's peace to come in an ever changing world.

And finally, I believe that as we grow older and accept our limitations, that we will do well to put our focus and resources in the emerging generations. Hoping and waiting for **the future** is no longer our future to own, but their's.

Perhaps, part of "our" preparation for God's surprise is empowering the young and the new ways, and not defending how things used to be.

My daughter, Katherine, should not be required to walk in my steps.
She needs to learn to follow Christ's "fresh" new steps in 2010 and beyond.

May God be gracious with us all. Learning and growing is not easy.
Waiting is not easy.