

2020-12-06 Wait for and Hasten

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Pastor Scott Austin

artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Dan Glading]

2 Peter 3:8-15a

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved on this day, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Thank you Dan. So I'm going to open with a question for you and I'm going to ask you to give me a one word answer in the chat on Zoom and those of you joining us on Facebook live you can have your own chat on Facebook. I won't get to see it until later but don't let that stop you from participating. So I want a one word answer to this question: How do you respond to the statement "It's not about the destination, it's about the journey." In one word, and this may be based on your personality type. Ok I already see a "groan", I see "cringe", I see "life." Good! You are all responding. "Slow down," "eye roll". We're getting two categories of response here. Ok we have a... "hmmm" that's a great response. "peace, struggle, truth". That's an Enneagram 7 who just said. We have an "ugh." Feel free to keep giving your one word responses to the sentence: "It's not about the destination, it's about the journey." But it's really interesting to

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see how different people respond to that, isn't it? You may be a person who naturally just stops to smell the flowers, and you may be a person who's always on time everywhere you go. And there may not be a whole lot of overlap between those two things - between those two types of people.

So let's talk about that in the context of Advent. Advent is the season of the Christian calendar where we are soaking in the idea of waiting for the Lord. And we imagine somewhat vicariously the idea of the Israelites waiting for the Messiah who had been promised. And this kind of waiting is expressed quite beautifully in the Hebrew Bible reading. That is what we call the Old Testament. But because we are Christians we believe that the Messiah has already come. And yet that there is still so much broken in our world. And so we as Christians are waiting for the work of God to be fully finished, and *this* kind of waiting is often expressed in the New Testament scriptures. And sometimes it's with very dramatic visions of some future apocalypse, some second coming down. So speaking of reading, as I've mentioned the readings from the Hebrew Bible and from the Christian scriptures - the New Testament - and I wonder how many of you spent some time this week reading the lectionary readings as I suggested last week? Remember last week I had you leave the meeting for a second and go Google the word lectionary so you could find how easy it is to get to the lectionary and read the Bible passages ahead of time? I know there aren't very many people with cameras on right now, so you know, you maybe don't want to wave by definition if your video's already off. But I hope that some of you took a chance to do that and took the opportunity to do that. And I encourage you all to do it throughout the season of Advent. At least just read the lectionary passages ahead of time and then you'll come to services on Sunday with some of the scriptural imagination and imagery and vocabulary. already kind of percolating in your hearts and in your minds.

So I noticed two things in today's lectionary passages. One is the way that they start - and this is much like last week - each one of them seems to start with some fairly dramatic language. So the Gospel reading from the Book of Mark begins this way: The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That's a strong beginning to a passage. The Isaiah passage that, you know, that you heard at the call to worship begins: Comfort. Oh comfort my people! What a powerful idea and a prayer that we could all be praying. You'll hear more from that passage at the benediction today by the way. And then there's the Second Peter passage which you heard Dan reading just a few minutes ago, which has some of that dramatic apocalyptic imagery in it. But it begins with this admonition: Do not ignore this one fact, beloved. Again, that's a strong beginning to a passage. It's one of the things that kind of pulls you in, makes you want to know what's coming next.

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The other thing that I notice in these texts, and maybe particularly I noticed in the last one that I mentioned from Second Peter, is a tension between God's time and our time. Now I could ask you to do the same thing and put a one word response to that phrase: "God's time versus our time." I imagine I might get a similar range of responses. You can feel free to do it if you want but I'm not going to read them out. But I just want to acknowledge that it seems to me that whenever someone uses the phrase "God's time" you know it's usually going to be as a way to try to soften some kind of disappointment that you've experienced. Have you ever had a pastor or a leader, parent, or somebody who was a friend tell you "well it's just... it's, it was in God's time"? Now, I actually find that language kind of defeatist and it also tends to make some assumptions that I think are probably false about how much God is moving levers and pressing buttons to affect the small details of our life. So you'll usually not hear me use the phrase "God's time," but in this case I think it actually fits the text pretty well, and it also fits the theme of Advent pretty well. And the thing is, it does perhaps come with some level of disappointment with, with some call to muster up patience that doesn't come easily to us. But that is what Advent is about. This is a season that invites us to dwell in that. How many of you have felt - ever in your life, but maybe recently - you just want God to act? That you just wish God would act. That you're really kind of hoping God will act soon. That you're wondering why God hasn't acted yet. And you can see how this puts you in a bit of a spiral. and the author here, the apostle, says: The Lord is not slow about his promise as some think of slowness but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. And then a few verses later says: Therefore beloved, while you're waiting for these things - and I don't know what you're waiting right now, I could guess - strive to be found by him at peace without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

So this seems to me to be a little bit of a different take on the idea of God's time. It basically says two things: first of all that God is not being slow, it's just that God operates on a timescale that is much bigger much longer than the one we operate on. And so what seems like a long time to us in our personal life and our experience of the world is not actually very long in the scope of the history of the world in the scope of the eternity in which God resides. And then secondly it says that it's probably good that God delays because it gives us a little bit more time to sort out the mess we've made. That's not usually the context when someone uses the phrase "it's not God's time yet", is it? I'm not sure it's as comforting.

But what really jumped out at me in this text was something that comes in the middle of those two parts of this passage, and it's something that appears to be a bit of a contradiction. And this is where I want to land for a little bit of time this morning. It comes in versus 11 and 12 and it says this: What sort of persons ought you to be in the leading lives of holiness and godliness,

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waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? First of all I love that this is phrased in the form of a question. RIP Alex Trebeck. But that's just good spiritual direction. Here's a question. I want you to answer it for yourself. What sort of person ought you to be, right? But more to the point for today, how can you do both of those things at once? How can you wait for the coming of the day of God while you also hasten the coming of the day of God? Oh, by the way, what kind of world are we living in where the things that you and I do have any kind of bearing on the coming of the day of God? I'm not sure that's a responsibility that I actually want and yet there it is right there in the text.

Well I'm almost done with this talk, the sermon here and I've asked a lot of questions but I haven't given very many answers. I need you to know that I am not sorry about that. But let me give you one thing to ponder here as I close. At the beginning of the sermon I made the observation that you might be a person who stops to smell the flowers and you might be a person who's on time and punctual and in a hurry and that there's, there's no middle ground between those two, there's no overlap between those two types of people. But I wonder if actually there is some overlap. I wonder if it's possible. And that we can find that overlap as we become more and more spiritually mature individuals, and as we become a more spiritually mature community. I wonder if it's possible for us to wait for the coming of the day of God by becoming more rooted in godliness and holiness. And we could spend a lot of time talking about what that means and I wonder then if that same godliness and holiness would not also create a focus for us on the eternal work of God in the world. But even more than that, if it would actually be part of making that work of God a more present reality in our world.

So, spiritually speaking, are you more inclined toward waiting patiently for the coming of the day of God? Are you more inclined to focus, say, on enjoying the journey and not worrying too much about the destination? Are you, spiritually speaking, a person who's more inclined toward smelling the flowers if you will? Or, spiritually speaking, are you a person who is in a hurry? Who is laser focused on your destination? Who doesn't want to miss that by not getting there soon enough? A person, spiritually speaking, who lives a life of urgency because you see all of the things that are wrong in our world and you want to hasten the day when God makes them right? The thing that I want you to ponder this week is whether or not God might be calling you to put those 2 ideas more in balance with each other. If you're a person who's waiting patiently, who's stopping to smell the roses, how can you bring in some of that sense of urgency about the state of the world and about your role in participating with God remaking it? And if you're a person who's kind of in a hurry, who can't wait for the coming of the day of the Lord, who can't wait to get past this thing and into that next thing, whatever it might be, maybe you need to engage in the spiritual practice of waiting. Of looking around for how God might be present

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with you with us right now, despite the fact that things aren't right. So smell the flowers and get there in a hurry. Wait patiently. Wait patiently but be transformed by urgency. And in all of it, seek godliness and holiness for this moment. And if you'll do that and I'll do that and all of us will do that I think we might begin to find that balance. That spiritual maturity. And I think we might be able to begin to inhabit the meaning of these challenging texts in these challenging times. May God be with you. Amen.

[End of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information, visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](https://www.ArtisanChurch.com).