

Fifth Sunday in Lent - A (2026)

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

‘I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope. My soul waits for the LORD, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.’ In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Time is relentless, isn't it? The movement of the second hand on the clock (remember those?) continues circling the face of the clock second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour. Sometimes we wish time would move more quickly, other times more slowly. For example, those going through cancer treatment cannot wait for the treatment to end; for them, time cannot pass soon enough. Or when one is anxiously waiting for the ambulance to arrive at the scene of an emergency. On the lighter side, many wish time would slow down so they can enjoy the moments that come with watching and engaging with their grandchildren as they grow, savoring every giggle, playing with toys, or enjoying a very messy ice cream cone. Time is a resource, or for some a gift, that when we are at our best, we use to its fullest; at our worst, we wantonly waste. Once time, however we measure it, is gone, it's gone. We cannot add minutes or hours to our day, and Matthew records in his gospel Jesus offering hope and encouragement to his followers by saying that they cannot add any time to their lives by worrying. Live 'in the moment' Jesus tells them, for tomorrow will come soon enough with its own set of issues to deal with.

Waiting is one way we use time. We wait for the plane to take off, for the post office to open, for the latest news on our cell phone to arrive, and for the pot of

coffee to be ready so we can start our day. But our readings for today speak to a different type of waiting, a better way to ‘use’ our time; time sanctified, or made holy, by God.

We learn to wait in ‘hope’ and ‘expectation.’ We learn several extremely important lessons: one being that God’s time isn’t necessarily our time. Sometimes they coincide, but often, at least for me, they don’t. A second is that God will use people and circumstances as and when he sees fit, and if we’re paying attention, we will notice or experience his revealed glory and power. To wait for the plane to depart is a passive activity; to wait on the Lord and to seek to operate more on God’s timeline is an active reality. It’s called ‘waiting patiently.’

I suspect most of us here this morning is familiar with today’s reading from John’s Gospel. Assuming I’m correct, we know how the story flows from the initial message sent by Mary and Martha to Jesus informing him that their brother, Lazarus, was ill, to the climactic ending where Jesus calls Lazarus to ‘come out!’ from his tomb and sure enough, Lazarus comes out still wrapped in his burial cloths, and Jesus telling ‘them’ to “Unbind him, and let him go.”

And yet, Jesus’ initial response is rather shocking. Rather than promptly heading to Bethany to be with his dear friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and offer his assistance, he tells those around him that “this illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ‘Accordingly.....he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.’ The text does not tell us if those who brought the initial message to Jesus ran back with the news that Jesus wouldn’t be coming right away, but I think we can all resonate with the sense of dread and despair that each moment, each hour, and each day brought, hoping beyond hope that Jesus might arrive in time to help heal Lazarus. We have all lived with and through these moments of anxiety and uncertainty where time seemed to ‘stand still’ as we awaited the news of the prognosis from the doctor, the arrival of the aforementioned ambulance, or news of a loved one ‘missing in action’ in war. How in the world could Jesus stay where he was for two

more days, we might wonder? Or why doesn't God seem to answer our prayers since he 'knows' better than anyone our situation and our plight?

The truth is, God does not always answer prayer as we either hope, expect, or within our timeline, and how we deal with this reality will shape how we handle moments of uncertainty and confusion moving forward.

Jesus makes it very clear why he delayed his trip to Bethany. I referenced it just a moment ago; that the 'illness would not result in death; *rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*' Jesus acknowledges the pain and sadness of Lazarus' death for those who were there, and in his humanity, he acknowledged his own sense of sadness, anger, and loss of his dear friend. In anticipation of what was to follow, Jesus asked Martha, "*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*" Jesus thanks the Father for hearing his prayer, and for the sake of the crowd that was present, that they might believe that he was from the Father, he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, and Lazarus complies. The dead-beyond-dead Lazarus exits the grave, is unbound from his burial clothes, and returns to his home with his sisters. John concludes that 'Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ''

Or what of the lessons we learn from the psalmist? Out of the depths of his misery, he pleads for mercy, acknowledging that God will hear his cry for help and that forgiveness and new life are only found in this one, true God. The psalmist writes that he 'waits' for the Lord; his soul waits for him; in his word is his hope, and that he does so more than watchmen wait for the dawning of a new day. The psalmist understands what it means to 'wait patiently' for the Lord. This image has always reminded me of military guards keeping watch during the night when all is dark, as they 'look' for that which is hidden and dangerous. They are alone at their post until they are relieved in the morning, knowing that morning will, in fact, arrive in due time.

‘Waiting patiently’ for the Lord allows us to see and experience the glory of God. ‘Waiting patiently’ on the Lord builds our sense of hope, trust, and expectation that, irrespective of the timing or the result, we rest in the knowledge that God will use our circumstances for his purpose and our benefit. God does not do anything that is not ultimately beneficial for us. It’s in our impatience that we think God doesn’t hear our prayers, or we end up taking actions without discerning how God might want us to respond to our circumstances. In our impatience, we fail to see the movement of God and rely on our own skills, abilities, and thought processes. To ‘wait patiently’ says that we trust in the sovereignty of God, and his wisdom and timing are perfect. To ‘wait patiently’ is an active process wherein we live fully ‘in the moment’ seeking and expecting that whatever God is up to will bring him glory and us a sense of peace, joy, generosity, and wisdom. Our lives of prayer, meditation, study of scriptures, and acts of charity and goodwill expand on our ability to ‘wait patiently’ because we know that God is active and accessible as we walk in his light and follow the Spirit’s leading.

The good Lord knows I struggle with this, and I suspect I am not alone. I don’t like ‘waiting’ for anything, let alone the level of Godly patience I need to live as fully as I’ve just talked about. But like the morning sun we know will rise in the east, God is faithfully encouraging us to ‘wait’ on him, to take the time to appreciate the gift of every day, to trust that God, even in the midst of significant trials and times of sadness and disillusionment remains ever present, to ask and seek what God is up to in our lives so that we too may offer our praises and thanksgivings as we live lives that are purposeful, meaningful, less stress-filled and bring glory to our God. Remember, the more we seek the heart of God, the more ‘patient’ we will become.

‘Wait patiently,’ dear friends, for God is at work in you, for you, and with you in this very moment; and when you least expect it, the heavens will open, and the glory, grace, and mercy of God will shine upon you. What a great ‘reward’ for letting God be God.