

“Waiting for....what”

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New Testament Lesson: Matthew 5:1-10

Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 42:1-4

According to the Bible, “you are God’s partner.” To God, you “aren’t a slave whose only duty is to do what you are told. You aren’t even an employee who agrees to do work in exchange for pay. You are a real partner whom God invites to share the responsibility for carrying out God’s plan for the world”

So says Barbara Wendland and Stanley Menking in their book “God’s Partners: Lay Christians at Work.”¹ And so says God’s Prophet in the Book of Isaiah, as given to us in the Bible. When Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God, declared, “Here is my servant,” he was talking about ancient Israel, our spiritual ancestors. “He will bring forth justice to the nations,” Of Israel, God says, That was Israel’s job – to establish justice to the ends of the earth. And for more than 500 years after Isaiah uttered this divine prophesy, the Israelites struggled, as they lived into their calling to collectively be the servant of God.

God knew they would struggle at this. After all, they were being held captive in Babylonian exile at the time. So of all the great nations back then, the Israelites were the least likely to be seen as the hope of the world. Nobody was looking for them to do anything of consequence. Nobody, except God.

God chose the lowly nation of Israel as the hope of the world, the servant and partner of God in establishing justice. Let’s look at some of the qualities of this servant in whom God delights. “He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street,” In other words, God’s chosen people are not loud or pushy, but rather meek and mild.

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.” Those who serve the Lord are gentle enough to walk through the grass and not break the tender shoots, move past a candle and not disturb the delectate flame.

Does that sound like the manner and tone of those in this world responsible for carrying out justice? Is our legal system always responsive to the needs of the communities it serves? Do our politicians quietly work for justice on behalf of their constituents, on behalf of this nation?

¹ Barbara Wendland and Stanley Menking, *God’s Partners: Lay Christians at Work* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1993), 2, 54.

Or do we see something a little more brutal playing out before us, people in Washington working harder to keep their jobs than to do them? And if that's true – if the systems we've established to administer justice are lacking in the essential qualities called for by God, what's a people to do, what are we to do?

Isaiah tells us what God would have us do. In describing the type of person who truly serves the Lord, Isaiah says, "He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth.... That's a tall order. It was a tall order for ancient Israel, and it's a tall order for us as Christian, as God's servants and partners, as God's people here today.

Working quietly and faithfully to do God's will, not succumbing to weariness or fatigue, standing up under that which would crush us. That, my friends, is a tall order. But God's word to us is more than "the order of day," the actions to be carried out. God's word to us is a promise of renewed strength when we do get tired, and the assurance of future success when things get out of control.

A man had been wandering lost in the desert for two days when he came upon a mission settlement where he got directions to town. Rather than walk, he asked to borrow a horse from one of the missionaries. The missionary said, sure but there is a special thing about this horse. You have to say 'Thank God' to make it go and 'Amen' to make it stop." Then he says, "Thank God, thank God," and the horse starts trotting. Feeling really brave, the man says, "Thank God, thank God, thank God" and the horse just takes off. Pretty soon he sees a cliff up ahead and in a panic, starts doing all he can to make the horse stop. "Whoa, stop, hold on!!!!" Finally he remembers, "Amen!!!" The horse stops just four inches from the cliff. "Whew", says the man. "Thank God."

Do you ever have one of those days? A time when nothing seems to go your way. You're at the end of your rope, completely spent. No more energy. Your spirit is depleted. Your hopes, dashed. And then the next day, you find the energy to get moving again, the hope of a new day ahead, the spiritual fortitude to stand up to whatever you might face. Where does that strength, that hope, that spiritual reserve come from? It comes from God.

God is counting on us as partners, and in that, we have the daily strength, hope, and inspiration to move forward. Each day, we can get up and do it again, knowing that God is on our side – or more precisely, that we are on God's side. How can we be sure we're on God's side?

One way is to pattern ourselves after God's son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. The words of the Prophet Isaiah also anticipate the coming of Jesus, telling the people of Israel about God's plan for them and for their salvation, for us and for our salvation.

Not only does Isaiah speak of Israel as a chosen people, his words also shine light on the true nature of Jesus the Messiah.

When Jesus was baptized by John, the Spirit of God descended like a dove and a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). These words could have come straight out of Isaiah 42: “Here is my servant ... my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him....” Knowing that it is in Christ that we faithfully serve God gives us the strength, hope and inspiration to face whatever comes our way.

This means that we don’t have to worry when the world presses down on us; God will raise us up. We don’t have to be defensive and forceful in carrying out our calling as Christians. God assures us that it is through gentleness, faithfulness, and mercy for one another that God comes to us.

Let’s keep that in mind this Advent season. Advent is a time of waiting, waiting on the Lord. We look forward with joyful expectation to the day when God’s way becomes the way – for everyone, everywhere! As Christians, we have that hope, that promise, that assurance.

And as God’s partners, God’s humble servants, there is another waiting going on here. We may be waiting on the Lord, but let’s keep in mind that the Lord is also waiting on us. Advent is a time for waiting. As we wait for the birth of Jesus this Christmas, let’s not make it all about us, what God and others can do for us.

No, let’s be mindful that God is also waiting, waiting for us as partners, partners with God in bringing about the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ’s advent, Christ’s coming, to us and through us to all whom we encounter this Advent season. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER:

Advent, Oh God, stirs such hope in us. In this season we find light, joy and peace – all glimpses of the world to come.

May these next three weeks be sacred and holy, filled with true love for humankind.

We want to see Jesus in this season – the reason for the season – and to let him be seen by all we meet.

Help us to drink in every moment, to behold the beauty and majesty, and to worship the King who was and is, and is to come.

Our hearts sing out to the glory of the Lord, Oh God. And so it is fitting that for the prayer that Jesus taught us, our voices sing out, too, as we raise our eyes toward heaven, singing:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive
our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**