

### “The Waiting Game”

John Milton the 17<sup>th</sup> Century poet is most famous for his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, about the fall of Satan from heaven and the fall of humanity that led to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Another famous work of his is *Sonnet 19*. This poem was written about one year after he started to lose his eyesight. In the poem he wonders how he will be able to participate in the work of God when he is blind.

The latter half of the sonnet reads:

“But Patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, ‘God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait.”

The last line could be a commentary on what we have heard in the scriptures today. The writers speak much about the virtue of patience.

The prophet Habakkuk sees an oracle from God and laments how the wicked surround him and his people, and how wrongdoing, destitution and violence are all around them but God seems unresponsive. He laments that the law becomes slack and justice becomes perverted. Despite all of this doom and gloom he resolves to stand at the watchpost to await what the Lord will show to him and what answer God will give.

That response is thus:

If [justice] seems to tarry, wait for it;  
it will surely come, it will not delay.  
Look at the proud!  
Their spirit is not right in them,  
but the righteous live by their faith.

God’s answer is simple—wait patiently the answer will come – for it is the righteous who live by faith, unlike the proud who do not have a right spirit within them.

Likewise Psalm 37 begins with the words “do not fret yourself because of evildoers.” Rather we are to put our trust in the Lord, we are to delight in God, and commit our way to the Lord. Indeed, so much happens in this world that we do not understand. If we spend our lives pondering what is wrong with the world we miss the joy and delight of pondering God and all that God has done. We are to be still before the Lord, and wait patiently on God. Those who wait upon the Lord will be rewarded.

The author of the Letter to Timothy takes a somewhat different tack as he talks about needing to be steadfast and patient himself during his imprisonment, and that the followers of Christ are not cowards, but have been given a “spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” They may feel impatient but he resolves to “Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”

Finally we have the passage from Luke where the disciples ask Jesus to “Increase our faith.” It is a rather remarkable question to ask. How can anyone’s faith be increased by someone else? Jesus responds with enigmatic parable about slaves and masters. I think there is more than one interpretation to this, but I am drawn to the idea that our time will come when it comes. That is we cannot expect something before the time is ripe. We live in the now and accept what is while waiting on the Lord to prepare a new reality where there are no slaves and no masters and all sit down to eat at the Lord’s table together. Just as we do each Sunday at the table we call the altar. The table where all are equal in God’s eyes regardless of station, riches, titles, education, and the myriad other ways that the world seeks to divide us and keep us from coming together in harmony.

We are in a world that runs to and fro like ants around the anthill. We seek to make our busy-ness a status symbol. How often have we asked someone how they are doing and the response is busy. God forbid that we should respond I am at peace. My soul is resting in the Lord.

Running about, even serving the Lord’s purposes, does not make us better Christians, it just makes us busy. So busy it may be hard to attend to what God is actually calling us to.

Waiting may have been written with a note of resignation on Milton’s part, but it needn’t be. We also serve God as we wait upon his clarion call do the work he has given us to do. When we allow ourselves to find moments of patience, quiet, and respite we allow the voice of God to creep in and make itself heard amidst the noise of this frantic and fragile world.