

We all have different mindsets toward delays.
And different delays may strike us differently.
A few samples along the waiting continuum:

I.

In Jan. 2004, four seminary classmates and I
crowded into our host's compact car
in Bangalore.

It was Sunday morning
and we had been invited
to a rural Christian church for worship.

They were expecting us at 10 a.m.
We left at 8:30 and drove aimlessly
on back roads.

By 9:30 we were impatient.
We wondered, Does our driver have any idea
where he's taking us?

By 10:30, we had given up any hope
of reaching the congregation
who was expecting us.

"Just find us a Christian church, any church
with signs of life, and we'll worship there,"
we told our young driver,
who was now sweating.

At 11 a.m. we pulled up to
End Time Harvest Church,
Pastor D. Samuel, Founder.
There were children playing outside,
a few cars, and congregational singing
audible through the unglazed windows.
We knocked on the door of the parsonage.
We explained our situation to a petite woman
in a sari,

who promptly invited us in to her home.
Please, sit down and have tea.

Isn't the worship service already going?
Oh, not to worry.

The assistant pastor will handle it.
Rev. Samuel will be right in to greet you.
Two daughters served us tea and biscuits.
And we were soon joined by the reverend,

who engaged us, delighted to host the first
American visitors to his remote little church.
[Waiting Will Do That to You.]

II.

John Van Nuys, a pastor in Crawfordsville, Ind.,
began his sermon on 2d Peter 3
with this remembrance of David,
a Wabash college senior,
and member of the rugby team.

He and some friends were playing
a pickup basketball game.

After snagging a rebound,
David drove the length of the court,
made a layup basket, collapsed, and died.
He was 21 years old.

In his sermon, Rev. Van Nuys said,
"David's death reminds us that we are,
all of us, mortal, from the day we are born."
David did not wait for life to make sense.

He got out and played the game.
[Waiting Will Do That to You.]

III.

In the golden days of radio,
there was a family series starring an aviator
who was always getting out of tight spots
with the aid of a wonderful ring
which did most everything.

One day, the radio announcer told listeners
they could have a magic decoder ring
just like their hero's.

All they had to do was send 3 boxtops
with a little money, and the ring
would be immediately mailed out.

Children throughout the nation gobbled
the breakfast cereal and sent off for the prize.
Tens of thousands waited for the mailman,
hoping each day would be the day
the ring would arrive.

After months of delay, their excitement waned.
[Waiting Will Do That to You]

The text invites us to lay our magic decoder rings aside and all our other expectations of immediacy and try to see the world the way God sees it. It challenges us to view matters from a vantage that approaches the way God knows the world, without regard to past, present, or future. The letter is shaped as a farewell discourse of the great apostle, Peter. Second Peter was probably written by a follower of the great apostle, a generation or two after the apostle's death, using the apostle's name to give weight to the author's theology. The author is concerned for a community so removed from believing in the return of Christ that they wonder, “Is he ever going to get here?” [Waiting Will Do That to You.] The purpose of apocalyptic scripture is not to speculate on when the world will end, but to encourage faithful living in the meantime. As a theology of waiting, the text answers two questions: “Will it be worth the wait?” And, “What do we do in the meantime?” That's a theology of Parousia – another word for Advent. Into such a season as Advent, the text promises God's grace – grace evidenced by delay of the final judgment. God has all the time in the world. What looks to us like delay seen another way looks like God's patience with humanity. Regarding the delay of the Parousia, the passage makes three points: (1) When viewed from God's vantage point, the duration of time that has passed is not significant enough to count for a delay. (2) Despite humanity's skepticism, the present age will be brought to a close.

(3) Christian believers have an intellectual and ethical responsibility to strive for godly living as they await Christ's return. But it seems like an endurance test, doesn't it? [Waiting Will Do That to You.] In a posture of expectancy, we are to go about the tasks of faithful living, trusting that God is with us in the Advent spaces of our lives. That's the theology of waiting. The goal of Second Peter is to share the mind of God – to see the cosmos from overture to finale as God alone can see it. ■ For people experiencing the American economy, the past 8 years have been a long wait. What passed for a stable existence fell apart. Asset values crashed. Jobs vanished. Family plans stalled. Nothing could be taken for granted. What does that kind of waiting do to you? We just need to have patience. Is God with us, here and now? I believe so. There are Christians who are more sure that God will be with us at the end of the road. Their faith is fatalistic. Their world is literally going to hell. They interpret the Bible in such a way that everything is destined to get worse and worse. So, it makes absolutely no sense to them to work for positive changes in the world. The best they can do is to get a few more people in the salvation life-boat before Jesus comes back. The only part of that I can agree with is that Jesus will return in judgment. Will it be worth the wait? Or will we have destroyed ourselves meantime?

Other believers in End-Times wait passively,
 expecting God to clean up after our messes.
 But that is not faith, that is despair.
 Another temptation is to think it is all up to us.
 That is not faith either, that is pride.
 As one commentator puts it,
 "God didn't just leave a to-do list
 on the refrigerator, saying,
 ‘Let me know when you get it all worked out.
 Good luck with that.’
 No, God came to us,
 and comes to us, and is with us.
 It is worth it to wait through this mess we’re in,
 because we are not alone.

Our reading today tells us that time
 doesn't exist for God in the same way
 time exists for me and you.
 God doesn't have a clock.
 God doesn't have appointments and meetings
 and special things to do at certain times.
 This is good news for us,
 because it means God is focusing all attention
 on us, not a clock or a timetable.
 God can carefully watch over each and every one.
 “The Lord is not slow about his promise,
 as some think of slowness,
 but is patient with you” (verse 9).
 God's grace is exemplified by divine patience.
 Without God's patience, we are surely doomed.
 Second Peter echoes the wisdom
 of the doxology that ends the Lord’s Prayer:
 “the kingdom and the power and the glory”
 belong to God, not to us.
 God has not delayed the end
 in order to gather more sinners
 for the lake of fire.
 God has delayed the final cosmic drama
 to allow for our repentance.
 Second Peter makes clear
 that God wants to save everyone.

God is waiting with patience
 ... **not wanting any to perish**
but all to come to repentance (v. 9).
 That’s something like universal salvation!
 In Second Peter! Who knew?
 Successful waiting
 addresses an ethical question as well.
 What sort of persons ought we to be?
 Repentant sinners, for starters.
 If you know that the boss
 might walk in any moment,
 what sort of worker ought you to be?
 If you know that a police officer
 might be in any car on the road,
 what sort of a driver ought you to be?
 If you know that the Lord's return
 could happen on any day,
 what sort of believer ought you to be?
 According to the words of this passage,
 we are to be holy, godly, righteous, spotless,
 and unblemished.
 When the opportunity
 to help others comes along,
 we shouldn't pass it by.
 We simply do not know how many
 other opportunities we'll be given.
 While we have life and breath,
 we can act on heaven's agenda.
 Waiting requires the peaceable spirit
 that is a fruit of genuine repentance.
 Waiting will teach you patience.
 [Waiting Will Do That to You.]
 What we are waiting for is not simply
 some New, Revised, Standard Version
 of our present world.
 Because, in this age,
 our world is devouring itself.
 Consumerism reigns unchecked,
 especially this time of year.

Yet this is the time of year
 when we celebrate another story,
 one given by God.
 It is the story of Jesus' humble birth.
 It is the story of servanthood,
 obedience, and right living.
 It is the story of salvation
 for people on the margins.
 Second Peter opens us to the poor
 who are overlooked in the midst of
 political posturing and commercial frenzy.
 For each one of us, the day of the Lord
 is only one last drive-for-the-layup away.
 After that last breath,
 there will be no more chances to accept Jesus.
 What seems to be a long delay
 in Christ's return
 is really God's gracious way of saying to us,
 from generation to generation,
 it is not too late to repent.
 We have time to get ready.
 God is with us as we live each day.
 In a posture of expectancy,
 we are to go about the tasks of faithful living,
 trusting that God is with us
 in the liminal, Advent spaces of our lives.

CONCLUSION

Our host that day in India, Rev. Samuel,
 took all the time necessary
 to make his unexpected guests feel welcome.
 His assistant pastor finally poked his head in,
 said something about the time being right,
 and our host stood up.
 Leading us up the stone steps outside his home,
 he asked over his shoulder,
 “Which of you is going to preach?”
 With no time to plan a strategy,
 the 5 of us entered the brightly-lit sanctuary,
 sweaty with scores of warmed-up worshipers,
 and took our places seats in plastic armchairs
 on the chancel, facing the congregation.
 Children draped marigold chains
 around our necks.
 A girl of about ten stepped up and said,
 “I’ll translate for you.
 We are waiting your word.” ■

Our text urges us to interpret
 the delay of Christ’s return
 not as a sign of God's absence,
 but rather as a sign of God's grace.
 There is no better time than Advent
 to repent of frantic preparations
 and seek the peace of Christ.
 Here’s what waiting will do:
 Give you patience,
 the fruit of a peaceful spirit.
 And give you peace,
 the fruit of faith-filled waiting.
 That’s our lesson’s Advent gift to you.
 Amen.