

2 Peter 3: 3-13 “Where is the Promise?” Rev. Janet Chapman 12/1/24

Bud asked us a few weeks ago whether we were sorry to see the political ads gone? The vote was pretty unanimous that we aren't going to miss them. Possibly that is because we are being inundated with holiday ads... and the longest Black Friday sales event ever, now no longer one day but weeks in advance. The ad that sticks in my brain is the Etsy commercial starring Waldo, an iconic character who is often spotted but rarely seen. In this year's Christmas ad, Waldo travels the world, being spotted everywhere he goes. Yet only when he returns home and receives a perfectly personalized Etsy gift from his best friend, does he finally feel 'seen.' With its emotional appeal, it is giving Hallmark a run for its money. “Where's Waldo?” grew famous back in the late 80's, as drawn by Martin Handford who specialized in drawing detailed crowd scenes. It became a phenomenon as children of all ages found joy in searching for the hidden figure amidst the crowd. He is identified by his red and white striped shirt, bobble hat, and glasses, but many drawings contain distractions using deceptive uses of red and white striped objects. I discovered Waldo is known as Wally in Great Britain, Charlie in France, Walter in Germany, and Holger in Danish just to name a few. But what I found most intriguing is that the name of Waldo actually hails from English roots meaning “God's Power.” Who knew? Thus, when we hear that phrase, “Where's Waldo?” it can literally be translated from its English heritage as “Where's God's Power?” As my seminary professor used to say, “that'll preach!”

That is exactly what the author of 2 Peter attempts to do...preach about where is God's power, God's promise, going to be realized? The text itself, which hails from a minor epistle or letter in the New Testament, is one of expectation. It reveals a bit of disappointment from the speaker, kind of like the little old lady in those Wendy's commercials 40 years ago who complains “Where's the beef?” The implications are that the hamburger is so small, you must look really hard to find it. Waldo is so heavily camouflaged in a crowd, that you need to intensely study the picture just to get a glimpse of him. The scripture says, “Where is the promise of his coming?” Scoffers say to the Christians of Second Peter, “For ever since the ancestors fell asleep, all

things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” In other words, nothing has changed: People still cheat, lie, and die. Life is still nasty, brutish, and short. The good still die young, nice guys still come in last, and things aren’t much better than they ever were – so what’s the point? “Where is the promise of his coming?” Peter Gomes notes we’ve probably heard various responses, like calm down and relax, just wait. It’s a t-shirt printer’s dream come true. The audience of 2 Peter is far removed from the earliest of Jesus’ followers, being written at a later date by a well-versed scholarly type and taking a philosophical, rather than literal, approach to time. He says we’ve got the timetable wrong, because with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day. The urgency of watchfulness for the second coming has dissipated and been replaced with a reminder that God operates in God’s own timing. The bottom line for impatient Christians comes in verse 13: “...according to his promise, we wait for a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells.” That is what we are supposed to do, the watchwords of Advent are wait and prepare, and most importantly, wait patiently.

We are reminded that patience is a virtue...scripture says, “O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for God, for God will give thee thy heart’s desire...” St. Augustine said, “Patience is the companion of wisdom”; St. Gregory said, “Patience is the root and guardian of all virtues”; the Chinese proverb notes that “patience is power: with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes silk”; and when we see heroic sufferings, pious Christians are prone to say that those sufferings were endured with “the patience of Job.” The funny thing is that when Job loses his fortune, family and health, and his friends turn against him, he doesn’t appear patient at all, but actually is pretty insistent about receiving an audience with God. Job senses the distance between his state of being and God’s is profound; there is no cozy familiarity in Job’s faith, even though he was a man of prayer and holiness. He feels hopeless as he laments, “Even if I wash myself with soap, and cleanse my hands with lye, yet you O God will plunge me into filth, and my own clothes will detest me.” This does not appear to be a patient Job but a Job who is anxiously pleading for a mediator. Job is longing for an Advent of

the Messiah who will have enough power and standing to lay a hand on God and enough understanding of the human condition to lay a hand on Job and bring them together. Job is impatiently waiting at this point for one who is able to tug on God's arm figuratively because he is divine as well as understand what it is to be human because he is one.

Yet this doesn't answer the question, "Where is God's power, the promise of his coming?" Where is this Divine yet human one? Where is the age of milk and honey, of justice and righteousness, of peace and gold? Things do seem to be where they have been since the beginning of time, as we live by the golden rule, not that golden rule, but the one that says those who have the gold, rule. Advent forces us to face the bleak sad truth that we have not yet seen "the promise of his coming," and we don't know when that will be. So Second Peter says, "while you are waiting, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation." While waiting, avoid pursuits that don't satisfy, stay clear of traps that make money no matter who it hurts, be wary of commercial distractions which are so loud there is no time for silence, no space to notice that nothing and no one has changed. Don't let Advent patience become a laziness that embraces the status quo as any sort of virtue and overlooks God's power active every day.

Maybe, in fact, what we need is a form of Advent *impatience*? We are meant to be *impatient* for that future in which the promises of God are actively fulfilled. Gomes says impatience is not the opposite of waiting; it is the opposite of self-satisfaction, and there is no one here who in Christ's name can be satisfied with where we are, with what we have done, or with who we are. Dare I say that when we consider God's values, when we take into consideration Christ's mission on earth from Luke 4: 18-19, "to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, set the oppressed free, and usher in the year of the Lord's favor," which basically means a jubilee year when all debts are forgiven, has there ever been a time in our human history that God's values have been fully enacted? Was there some golden age when all was well and I missed it? Maybe those who long for the good 'ole days, the

days when America was great, and everything was supposedly perfect tend to forget the reality that in God's eyes, according to God's values which are far more important than our own, we have never lived up to the challenge. Advent doesn't honor those things as they were or as they are, only as they are to be. It encourages our impatience until those things – that new heaven and new earth wherein righteousness dwells - are achieved. Three things can help us to remember the virtue of such Advent impatience: 1. We are not what we ought to be, so pray. 2. We are not where we ought to be, this is not our destination, so hope. 3. What we have, no matter how much or how little, is not what we need, so work. Pray, hope and work – these are the engines driven by Advent impatience and being discontented with how things are. When we long for God's promise to be fully realized, the Advent path reveals the virtue of impatience to prod us on towards Bethlehem. Let us not grow lazy but pray, hope and work with God's power within us all to build a new heaven and earth in our midst. Amen.