

Exaudi (Seventh Sunday of Easter): May 21, 2023
“Waiting and Waiting....So Much Waiting”

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Our Introit is taken from Psalm 27, and in this Psalm David leads the believer's lips to confess trust in the Lord. David trusts the Lord, who is his Light and Salvation, the strength of his life. This is not mere sentiment on David's part. It is based in history and founded on the promises of God. He is a man after God's own heart, singularly focused on the one thing needful, desiring and seeking the distillation of all Christian hope: that he dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. Yet, at the same time, he is impatient and frustrated and pleads: Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice. Have mercy also upon me, and answer me. While having faith, David is human and more than once he caves to his sinful nature; David is tired of waiting.

This world is not yet what God has promised it will be. David's life in Christ, on this side of glory, was hidden. He had to wait for the Lord to reveal the fullness of His mercy. So along with exuberant praise and thanksgiving, David urges God to act according to His promises, to keep His Word, to hear and answer David's prayer, to bring justice and vengeance against the wicked and to deliver him out of this sad plane.

The disciples found themselves in a similar situation on the Sunday after the Ascension. For forty days they had seen the risen Lord. The Scriptures had been opened to them. Their hearts soared. Then Jesus ascended and was seated at the right hand of His Father. Human nature was elevated. Heaven is now open for the apostles and for us. They returned to Jerusalem, according to Jesus' command, rejoicing and waiting.

Waiting. So much of our faith is and always has been waiting: Simeon waiting for the consolation of Israel; Paul waiting for the return of his sight; Moses waiting for the time when the people could enter into the promised land. David exhorts us: Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord. The apostles, after the Ascension, had to wait several more days more for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them power to perform miracles, the joy of salvation, and the peace that passes all understanding, but when the Lord promised the Spirit in the Upper Room on the night in which He was betrayed, He also promised crosses. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit means that the apostles are finally going to get to work and that means martyrdom. Jesus says: “When the Helper comes, you will be my martyrs. They will put you out of the synagogues and whoever kills you will think that he offers to God divine worship.”

Once they get to work, a new sort of waiting begins. Even as they toil in the ministry, they wait to be released through the passage of death from their own unique sorrows and pain. Now that has come for them. Now they engage in another sort of waiting. In this, like our departed loved ones, they are one step ahead of us. They have been confirmed in bliss. They are relieved of all their sorrows. But they still wait and they cry to God. They wait with us and for us, and they cry with us and for us.

We are now waiting for that relief and we are also waiting for all of the elect to be sealed in the waters of Holy Baptism, that we would join together, one Church, in body and spirit before the Lamb, without heresies, schisms, or division, without fear, frustration, or anger; without sin, death, and the devil. We wait for the fullness of God’s mercy to be revealed and known and in the meantime, all the earth groans with us.

Thus we cry: “Come, Holy Spirit. Come, Lord Jesus. Bring the Father to us and us to the Father.” We live in and with waiting, by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and in constant prayer. We cry:

***⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!***
***⁸ You have said, “Seek my face.”
My heart says to you,
“Your face, LORD, do I seek.”***
***⁹ Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.
Cast me not off; forsake me not,***

*O God of my salvation!*¹

And while we wait and pray, we take to heart the exhortation of St. Peter. The end of all things is at hand. Thanks be to God: the end of all things is at hand. The end of jealousy, the end of disappointment, the end of failure; the end of guilt, shame, and regret. The end of loneliness, sickness, and fear. The end of politics, egos, and plots. The end of all things is at hand: all lies, all threats, all false promises. God be praised! The end of all that, of all things, is at hand. This is all coming to an end and all our longing, all our waiting, will be met. Our prayers will be answered. Our hope will be known.

So let us be serious and watchful. This isn't a matter of frivolity or convenience. This is essential. It demands reverence. Let us be serious and watchful. Let us be fervent in love for one another, knowing that love covers a multitude of sins. Let us walk worthy of the calling to which we are called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering. Bear with one another in love. Endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

All of us are dissatisfied with ourselves and to some degree with each other. We are not the men, the husbands or wives, parents or children, pastors or members, that we were meant to be. But we know what we were meant to be. We know because we know Jesus. He is our Advocate and Example, the true Man. He keeps the Law and shows us the way. We want to be like Him. And we are thus eager for the fullness of His promises, to be conformed to His image. We are eager for the eschatological peace promised to shepherds in their fields and given to the apostles in the upper room and bestowed upon us each week at the Holy Communion.

Bear with one another in love. Cover one another's faults and weaknesses. You are not yet what you were meant to be but neither were you meant to wait alone. Before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the undoing of the curse of Babel, David cried out in the first person singular. He says, "Deliver ME not over until the will on MY enemies," but Jesus teaches us to pray in the first person plural, "Deliver US from evil." We pray with Jesus and with one another. We are the Church. We are family. This isn't just a slogan: we really are in this together.

¹ Psalm 27:7-9

The Holy Spirit has gathered us and bound us together that we might comfort one another with the testimony of Christ. Though we appear weak in the eyes of the world, unable to overcome our own passions and lusts, subject to the whims of governing authorities and weaknesses of our own leaders in the Church, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, in the authority of the Father, we are more powerful and central to history and even to the well-being of the entirety of the cosmos, than any, even we, could imagine.

The Church, in her humility, including this congregation, you sitting here with one another, you are the vehicle of the Holy Spirit. He, who hovered over the darkness, destroys it with order and with love. The angels hold back the destructive winds of the final judgment that those destined for judgement might be pardoned by grace. They do it for the Church. The coming apocalypse is delayed, and we wait, all of us, for the sake of the elect, for the Church, for our own brothers and sisters, known and unknown.

The Holy Spirit poured out on us in Holy Baptism was not given that we might rule the earth in the ways of men or to satisfy our desires for vengeance or to simply bring us the warm, fuzzy feelings of a Hallmark Christmas movie. The Holy Spirit has been given to us that we would have the courage to testify of Christ whatever the cost, that we would be steadfast and resolute, even in the face of sickness, persecution, or death. The Holy Spirit comes to strengthen weak knees, to make strong feeble hands, to testify to us and through us of Christ for the life of the world.

The first person singular of David takes on new nuance in this reality. We are one Body of one Spirit, with one calling, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. We cry to together by grace in unity, with one voice:

- ¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*
- ² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.*

- ³ *Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.*
- ⁴ *One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to inquire in his temple.*
- ⁵ *For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.*
- ⁶ *And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.²*

In our impatience and frustration, our weariness of waiting, we are also hopeful. Jesus lives. He is our light and salvation. He has bought us by His death. He has justified us in His resurrection. He ascends to send the Spirit. He is working all things together for good.

We cry to Him to hurry up, to make haste, to hear us. And at the same time, fervent in love for one another, we cry to one another. We cry that Jesus lives, that He has won the victory for us, that He will bring us home. In one another, by Word and Sacrament, the Comforter, promised of Jesus, comforts us and teaches us to pray as the Church, for the Church, with the Church.

² Psalm 27:1–6

Jesus lives. Our time for waiting is soon ended. As we wait, may we pray with David:

*¹³ I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!*

*¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!³*

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

³ Psalm 27:13–14

Prayer of the Church
Seventh Sunday of Easter (Exaudi)
21 May 2023

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Lord, guard and protect Your Church, that she may be kept faithful in the face of temptation and persecution and be made fruitful in the work she does in Christ's name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, once You set apart Matthias for service. Raise up faithful pastors for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, and faithful men and women to be teachers, musicians, deaconesses and directors of Christian education and outreach, that these may serve for the benefit of all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You have placed us in communities and families where we are nurtured in the knowledge of Your Word and in love. May we be faithful teachers of that Word to our children and those not yet of the kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You are the ruler of all things. Grant that the nations may enjoy peace, goodwill, an end to terror and bloodshed, and freedom from tyranny. Guide our leaders to be faithful in their service, for the protection of life and the pursuit of all that is just and good. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, bless our land and our people. Shield us from pestilence that devours vegetation, from drought that steals the harvest and from hunger when the fruits of the field are scarce. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You give us endurance for the race set before us. Grant that we may run the course You have given us in faith. According to Your good will, give healing to the sick, relief to the suffering, comfort to the grieving and peace to the dying. *We especially remember before You Zoey, David, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, Pete, and those we name in our hearts.* Strengthen them in weakness, and grant patience in their trials. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, fill us with joy as we approach Your altar to receive the body and blood of Christ. Give us the peace that surpasses understanding, the gladness no man can take from us and the hope that does not fade away. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks that through Your Holy Spirit You have appointed us to bear witness to Your dear Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Since the world cannot endure this testimony and persecutes us in every way, encourage and comfort us, we implore You, that we would not be offended by these crosses, but continue steadfast in Your testimony and be found always among those who know You and Your Son until we obtain eternal salvation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**