



Stepping Outside the March of Time

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Second Sunday of Advent + December 10, 2023

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The gift of Advent is not just the birth of the Christ Child at the end of these weeks. It is the gift of a new sense of time. Last week we reflected on how Advent invites us to place ourselves in the span of creation history, from alpha to omega. Today in our second reading we meet yet another invitation to experience time in a different way. The Lord is not slow about his promise as some think of slowness, Peter writes, but is patient with you -- not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

Even as we hear at the end of Revelation, "Surely I am coming soon," we know that that this "soon" is different from our customary soon. I will get that done for you soon, meaning in the next few days. Or I'm coming, hold on a minute, I'll be there soon. Soon means days, hours or maybe minutes. It's right around the corner. It's *going* to be happening. Just hang tight.

I can understand how anyone might think God IS slow about God's promises. Since Jesus' death nearly 2,000 years ago, the earth and all its creatures have been waiting for him to return. "All Creation Waits," in this beautiful book Jaime recently reminded me of -- each day of Advent focusing on a different wild animal and how their bodies are miraculously conditioned to survive the long cold winters.

Has God given us such innate abilities to await the reconciliation of all things in God's love? Perhaps, but we grow impatient. When will God lay the straight highway through the desert of our lives in which we have been wandering? When will those rough places in the world, those nightmarish arenas of suffering and death, be levelled out and made into a plain? Is it not taking too awfully long for the messenger to prepare the way? In that heartbreakingly beautiful phrase from Psalm 85, when *will* righteousness and peace kiss each other?

The words of Psalm 13 echo through this season: How long? How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? We are waiting! We are counting the minutes, hours, days, years!

More than any other element of our lives, Advent raises up out of the minute to minute tyranny of time and invites us into a new way of being, a new form of prayer, a new mode of living.

I quickly admit I am as guilty as anyone else, probably more so, of being a prisoner of time. I need to know where I am positioned with my work at every juncture in the day. Even as I pray in the early morning I have my eye on the tableside clock.

At work, I am constantly looking at my watch -- how much more time do I have to get these jobs done? Where has the day gone? How am I going to get everything on my daily index card list accomplished? Prioritize, prioritize -- what is urgent, what at this point in the day can I put off until

tomorrow? One little source of comic relief is that the clock in my office is still set to daylight savings time because I haven't managed to climb up and change it yet. But now I enjoy the little surprise it keeps giving me. I look up from my desk -- "O my gosh, it's already 3:30? ... No -- wait -- it's only 2:30. Whew!"

Why do we allow time to rule our lives like a strict taskmaster? We are so impatient, aren't we, when it comes to the passing of time? Waiting in line at the department store to return an item. Waiting on the phone while we've been put on hold, often to terrible music, or after we've heard that annoyingly ungrammatical prompt: "Your call will be answered in the order it was received" -- no, in the order IN WHICH it was received. Waiting through three or four light changes at Cowpath and Vine (early in my time here I called the Borough about this short green light and was told it is a PennDOT issue).

Instead, Advent asks us to let go of this horizontal plane of minute-to-minute existence and think vertically. Rather than focusing on "what's next," ask: What is the nature at any given time of your connectedness to God and God's promises -- not when they will take place but in terms of the quality of the promise? And how does your new awareness of this promise *change everything*?

The phrase "this changes everything" has become a cliché in our culture. But the awareness Advent calls us into that God's promise of ultimate reconciliation and restoration is real really does change everything, because now this truth governs our lives. The banner under which we live becomes love, not fear; life, not death.

This truth is made tangible to us all over again, in the flesh, each Christmas—the truth that God loves us so much that he would take the Word, which had been with God from the beginning, and send his beloved Son in human form into the tyranny of time and the march of sin to be hunted, tried, executed, and then raised as a living sign of the fullness of life, forever, that we all have in Christ. And all for us, we sinners who have never had any right to expect such a grace-filled gift.

Now, instead of being ruled by the fear of what tasks we might not do, we decide how our lives will unfold in light of this truth. Each waking moment is now sculpted by life, not death; by love, not fear; by compassion, not cowardice. We enter into each new day not driven by the specter of either failure or accomplishment at the far end of it, but buoyed -- lifted -- by hope and expectation.

As we move through each day, what opportunities will greet that give us the chance to attest to this new reality? It could be something as simple as a kind word you did not know you'd be in a position to offer; a gesture of compassion you might otherwise have thought was reckless; or a gentle pillow of time God's Spirit carved out of your day so that you could be the presence of Christ to someone who really needed it.

Advent calls us to enter into each new day full of hope and bearing arms filled with love. Keep awake for to the possibility of all those ways you might rise above the march of and live in this new way to which the God of love is calling us.

Amen.