

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Newark, DE
Second Sunday in Advent – December 10, 2017/Year B
The Reverend Elizabeth Masterson

I purchased a handmade “refrigerator” magnet at the Craft Fair last weekend—which speaks both to my personality and to one of the Advent themes. It says: “I had my patience tested. I’m negative.” No need to explain about my personality—although I try to hide my impatience when I’m at work. But what does patience or the lack of it have to do with Advent?

Patience or lack of it often surfaces when we have to wait. David Lose*, a Lutheran pastor and seminary president, describes two types of waiting. One he says feels empty or pointless: such as waiting to sing Christmas carols (although we don’t have to wait to hear them), waiting to decorate the church until after Advent IV (really difficult this year since Advent IV and Christmas Eve are the same day), waiting to find out—if we’re children—what’s in those boxes under the tree. For people who have experienced a loss of a loved one near Christmas time, they may be just waiting for all the hoopla to be over and their pain to diminish a bit.

The other type of waiting Pastor Lose describes is “weighty, significant, and really matters.” For him Advent involves focuses on waiting for the promises God has made to us to be fulfilled. So are we to be patient as we wait

for God to act in God's own time? In Peter's second letter he says: "But in accordance with his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth where righteousness is at home." To tell the truth, I am a bit impatient about waiting for a society where righteousness is at home. I really don't see it on the news. I really don't see it in the commercialism of pre-Christmas. And if I am completely honest with myself—sometimes I don't see it in myself either.

How can we find a way to wait patiently for something "weighty, significant, and [that] really matters"—to find holiness in our time of waiting called Advent?

Perhaps if we can hold certain images in our minds—drawn from our readings this morning—we can discover a way to find not only the patience to wait, but also the will to act while we wait. Pastor Lose calls our will to act as accepting God's invitation "to participate *here and now* in [God's] eschatological promises"—that is, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness is at home.

The first image: one of wilderness (desert is considered wilderness) transformed by a level highway. This highway goes through raised valleys and lowered mountain and rough, uneven places made into a plain. We are not

talking asphalt here, but a walkable path where all people can draw near to and see the glory of God.

The second image: a gentle and good shepherd who feeds the flock by leading them to rich pastures, gathering the lambs who need help in his arms and tending to the mother sheep.

The third image: a personification of significant values embracing from Psalm 85—“Mercy and truth have met; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” This verse reminds me of Mary going to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, and their embrace of one another. Both women are pregnant in remarkable ways, full of mystery. Mystery also surrounds the reality of this verse.

The final image: John the Baptizer with his wild appearance and strange diet. He calls to the people to repent, be baptized and wait for “the one” who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

(On purpose I have left out the image from Peter’s second letter of the passing away of heaven and earth with a loud noise and refining fire—because that’s a different sermon.)

These four images offer us images of the coming of the Messianic Age: we will know God in all God’s glory; we will be tenderly cared for; we will find

the values of holy living—mercy and truth, righteousness and peace—guiding us, and we will be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Surely this age deserves patiently waiting for God to bring it to fulfillment, but there's a bit more than just patient waiting. We need to act while we wait—remember Pastor Lose's admonishment! He says the "key message of Advent" can be found in God's promises kept: most certainly in the stable in Bethlehem; most certainly in the hope we find in our hearts through our faith; and most certainly in God's invitation to us to join with God in keeping God's promises. We do this when we act to heal people who are physically wounded and people who are broken hearted. We do this when we act to comfort people who are sorrowful and grieving. We do this when we see injustice and act to bring justice into the lives of people for whom justice has been delayed or denied. God's promises have been kept, are being kept and will be kept—and we can be part of that promise keeping! Our time of waiting in Advent can be a holy, not an impatient, time to gain clarity about God's revelation of God's self and clarity about the light of God that has come in our hearts and strengthens us to act as agents of God's self-giving love.

*David Lose, "Active Waiting" from his blog . . . *in the Meantime*, Advent 2B, 2014