

Imagine you find yourself needing to call customer service. So you dial the number and wait. Then there's a voice. "Thank you for waiting. Your call is very important to us." You hear those words and you know you're going to be put on hold. Often, the robot voice will tell you how long the wait time is expected to be. "Waiting is the hardest part," sang Tom Petty in his hit song with the Heartbreakers in 1981.

Back then, in the 80s, it was certainly true that waiting was hard. Imagine, for example, waiting in the waiting room of a doctor's office **with no smartphone** and only some outdated magazines to peruse. You would've had no contact with the world beyond that antiseptic, boring room, until you were mercifully called back for your examination, where you would wait some more, this time without magazines! No wonder they call us "patients."

Today, we have multiple entertainment options right at our fingertips to keep us occupied while we wait. But despite all that technology, waiting is still hard. We wait at airports (in security lines, in boarding lines); we wait in waiting rooms; we wait in traffic; we wait at the bank; we wait for a human when calling customer service. We wait ... and our patience runs thin.

A little planning, however, can make that wait time productive and perhaps even fun. For example, here's a list of things someone came up with -- probably while they were waiting to mail a Christmas package at a local post office. Perhaps these ideas might help you endure your wait time at the airport, when it is safe to fly again, when you are there hoping to catch a flight to some exotic location!

*Strike up a conversation with a stranger and learn their story. *Pull out your journal and describe everything you see in the waiting area. This trains you to be observant, and it exercises your writing chops. *Work through and delete all of your emails. Nobody likes to do this, but it's a great way to burn an hour or three.

*If you can find an outlet, recharge all your electronic devices. Even better, offer to share your chargers with someone else. It's a great conversation starter. *Buy kitschy postcards from a newsstand and write notes to your friends and family and mail them later. These are just a few great ideas if you have a couple of hours to kill.

But what if the wait time is going to be longer -- like, maybe, a couple thousand years? That's the dilemma the early church was facing after Jesus' ascension into heaven. He had promised to return, and many in the church believed that His return was imminent. As time passed, however, and as the persecution of Christians intensified, the waiting became the hardest part for the those who were members of the body of Christ. In fact, some were beginning to question whether Jesus would return at all.

That's the situation the author of 2 Peter addresses, in our second lesson this morning. This letter, which is a follow-up to another letter that bears the name of Peter the apostle, reads more like a theological instruction manual, than a typical epistle and for good reason. In his first letter, the writer encourages the church, which is being pressured by external forces, while here in the second letter he addresses the problems arising from internal sources -- namely, false teachers who were skeptical about Jesus' return, and whose teaching thus encouraged looser ethical and moral behavior.

Our letter today reminds the church that Jesus will indeed, return as promised, to bring justice and abolish evil, ushering in the new creation....and how we conduct ourselves as we wait for his return will have implications for eternity. Peter understands that **waiting** is the hardest part, but what seems like a long, slow waiting period for Christ's return, is actually a gift from God. The Lord is not slow or tardy, but rather extends his own patience to allow time for people to "come to repentance."

The "day of the Lord" is coming like a "thief" and on that day the deeds of all people on earth will be "disclosed" as if cleansed by fire. In the interim (even if it's a long interim), Peter asks, "What sort of persons should we be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?" A new heaven and new earth are coming in which the author of our letter declares, "righteousness is at home" so, it might be beneficial for us to take some time to think about what we should doing while we wait.

The short answer.....is that those who follow Christ should begin living a righteous life, of the future new creation, as though it has already arrived. After all, it is probably safe for us to assume, that there will be a period of waiting before Jesus returns. But it's not to be a passive one in which we, like the disciples at the ascension, keep staring up at the sky waiting for the Lord's arrival. Instead, Peter says that there are certain things we should "strive" to do in the interim. If we look closely at the message of 2 Peter as a whole, we discover a list of at least four things we can (and should) do while waiting for the new Advent!

First, we are to remember the promise of the first Advent. Peter opens his letter by reminding his readers of the faith that they received "through the righteousness of our God and our Savior Jesus Christ." That's a powerful witness to the Incarnation. Jesus is both God and Savior. Peter and the other disciples were eyewitnesses to God made manifest in Jesus Christ, remembering the voice of God during the transfiguration proclaiming, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." As we continue to celebrate the season of Advent, it's a chance for us to remember again that God has come to us in person, in the flesh, in Christ and, in doing so, God has confirmed the truthfulness of his promises toward us. And the Lord for whom we wait is always true to his word!

Second, we should work at growing into the image of Christ. When Jesus returns, Peter urges his readers to "be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish." In fact, this was the way we were meant to be from the beginning when

we were created in the image of God. We became subject to "corruption" because of human sin, but because of what Christ has done in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, we can once again become "participants of his divine nature."

Peter thus urges us to make every effort to support our faith in Christ through acting out the virtues of goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, and love. Focusing on these things will keep us from being "ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is what Peter means by living lives of "holiness and godliness" -- lives that look more and more like Jesus.

Third, we are to dig deep into our Bibles. Peter and the other disciples had witnessed all the promises of Scripture confirmed in Jesus. He thus encourages his readers to dig deep into God's Words and be attentive to them "as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star arises in our hearts." When we read Scripture, we recognize that the message about Jesus wasn't a human invention, but that it came through "men and women moved by the Holy Spirit [who] spoke from God." In a world where practically everyone is eager to share information and their opinions via social media, Scripture calls us back to the truth of God revealed by those inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We must always be prepared to compare the words of others to the Word of God. As Peter puts it, "You should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles." When we engage Scripture daily, we galvanize our memory of God's Word, and more consistently live it out each day.

The fourth and final thing we should do; is learn to use our time wisely. Peter urges his readers to "regard the patience of the Lord as salvation." In this interim period as we wait for the return of Jesus, we have the opportunity to use the time God has given us to share our faith with others. Peter, like the apostle Paul,

spent every waking minute looking to share the good news about Jesus with anyone he met. And he did so with a sense of urgency in anticipation of Christ's coming. According to Peter, Paul's writings may have been hard to understand and were vulnerable to being twisted by the ignorant and the insidious, but they were nonetheless powerful because they were designed to impact others with the gospel.

Disciples of Jesus recognize that God has given us time to spread the word about Jesus, and we need to use that time wisely. Those conversations we might have with people in the waiting room at the doctor's office, or while we are in line at the post office with our Christmas packages, are opportunities to have spiritual conversations as the Spirit leads. After all, Peter says in his first letter, "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting of the hope that is in you."

Sure...all of this waiting might be the hardest part of being a Christian, but it's also the most important part! God has given us the tools, and the time, to bring His good news to the world in anticipation of a Second Advent. So let's strive to remember Jesus' birth, let's work at becoming more like Christ, let's dig deeply into God's Word, and let's try to use our time wisely as we await the Lord's return. Thanks be to God! Amen.