

**Altavista Presbyterian Church
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Anticipation”
I Kings 3:5-9
Romans 8:19-25**

**Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 30, 2017**

I Kings 3:5-9

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, “Ask what I shall give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?”

Romans 8:19-25

For creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

“Anticipation”

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In 1971, the singer-songwriter Carly Simon quickly pieced together a simple song while awaiting a date with fellow singer-songwriter Cat Stevens. The song, titled “Anticipation,” peaked at number thirteen on *Billboard Magazine*’s pop singles and ranked seventy-second on their top 100 singles of 1972.¹ The first verse goes:

We can never know about the days to come
But we think about them anyway
And I wonder if I’m really with you now
Or just chasing after some finer day.

Now I cannot speak to Ms. Simon’s religious convictions, but I do think many Christians can resonate with her words. In fact, one of the central aspects of Christianity is waiting. We even have an entire liturgical season dedicated to waiting, which is Advent. John the Baptist spent *years* prophesying of the advent of the Savior. Jesus tells his disciples that they must *wait* for the Holy Spirit to come and guide them. Paul and Peter preach of *waiting* for the second coming of Christ. Every year we celebrate Easter, remembering God’s gracious work in the past but always looking forward, towards a future of glory and everlasting life. Jesus himself tells us that only the Father knows when that time will come, so we are “stay awake” for the Son of Man will come at an

unexpected hour.² The first verse of “Anticipation” does a surprisingly good job of summarizing the anticipation some Christians feel in the interim of the Son’s return. Ms. Simon is right that “We can never know about the days to come / but we think about them anyway.” The real struggle, however, occurs when our anticipation and our present reality come into conflict.

Unsurprisingly, Paul speaks to this. While I highly doubt Paul knew anything about Carly Simon, I fully believe he knew a lot about anticipation. He says that all of creation is waiting in anticipation, in eager longing, for the revelation of the adopted children of God. If you remember, last week we spoke about the inheritance the Christian receives by her adoption as a child of God through the life and work of Jesus Christ. Now, the Apostle is telling us that the revelation of our adoption is not fully known until the moment of God’s choosing. This waiting is both a good thing and a bad thing. It’s a good thing because we, the Church, still have a lot of work to do. There are still a whole lot of people out there who have not heard the Good News of Jesus Christ. There are tons of people out there who have not witnessed the loving kindness of the Spirit. This wait is good because we, you and I, still have a lot of work to do in mortifying the flesh and building up our relationship with God and our neighbors. There’s still a lot of work to be done. On the other hand, the longer God waits, the more the devil likes to trick us into believing he’s won and to just let sin rule our lives because there’s no better time than the present.

Truthfully, God isn’t “waiting” because there is no time for God. God knows exactly when he will reveal to the world his adopted household. We are the ones who are waiting. And if there is one thing I know for certain, it’s that humans are antsy. As a race, as a people, we can’t seem to stay still. We always have to be moving. It’s hard for us to take a moment and listen intently for the still, small voice of God. We’d rather lend our ear to the thunderstorm, firestorm, or earthquake. And that’s how sin gets us. Iniquity knows we’re easily distracted by the boisterous and flamboyant. In our anticipation, we often let ourselves wander into areas where we ought not be. To add insult to injury, life is often accompanied by suffering. The longer we are waiting for God’s advent, the more it seems people suffer. And it doesn’t seem to matter who is affected: good people, bad people, by war, famine, cancer. The world is, as Paul describes, groaning in pain and agony in its waiting.

Ms. Simon also summarizes the woes of the human race. In the final verse of “Anticipation,” she says,

And tomorrow we might not be together
I’m no prophet, I don’t know nature’s way
So I’ll try to see into your eyes right now
And stay right here, ‘cause these are the good old days.

There’s a lot about tomorrow that we don’t know. It’s for this reason the Apostle James teaches us to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”³ The unbiblical response, unfortunately, is precisely what Ms. Simon penned forty-six years ago. She says she’d rather “stay right here,” instead of longing and striving for the something better that is to come. And why? Because “these are the good old days.” Isn’t that the nature of human responses? We long for “the good old days.” Older generations long for the days of their youth, when church pews were filled to the brim and the coffers overflowed. Younger generations long for the youthful days of their present. The good

old days are today because the here and now is the only thing that is certain for them. A few years back, the acronym YOLO went viral. “You Only Live Once.” Folks would shout “YOLO” as they performed something risky or out-of-the-box. It’s funny and cute. But YOLO is a lie. This life isn’t all that there is. There is life after this one. There’s an eternity that awaits. I don’t know if the Apostle Paul would be amused or appalled at YOLO, but I am certain he would vehemently disagree. I’m sorry, Carly Simon, but these are not the good old days. The Fifties and Sixties were definitely not the good old days. The only “good old days” were the days in the Garden of Eden. But those days did not last very long. So the next “good old days” lie neither in the past nor in the present, but are in the future. Not just any future, but in the future of God’s kingdom.

This coming glory, this coming kingdom, is precisely what Paul is talking about in this section of Romans eight. We live “in hope” says Paul, that “creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption.” The “good old days” for the Christian are not the perceived righteousness of previous generations nor the wanton liberalities of the present. Days of freedom, true freedom from the bondage of sin, those are the days we long for, and they lie ahead. This is what Paul means when he speaks of all creation “groaning together in the pains of childbirth.” I want to be honest with y’all. I have never given birth. I will never give birth to anything. So when I say I know it’s painful, I’m speaking philosophically, because I will never know the pain of giving birth. The beauty of Paul’s metaphor, however, is intimately tied to the beauty of child bearing. The end goal of pregnancy is neither the labor pains, the mood swings, nor the swelling. Just ask any mother. The beauty of pregnancy is the bringing forth a life, a child into the world. The present course of human history has been and will continue to be this time of labor. Suffering, change, and uncertainty will continue to abound, but this present strife is not the end goal. There’s something more, something beautiful coming. We just have to wait.

There’s waiting and then there’s waiting. On the one hand, you have the nervous anticipation that is plagued by doubt, anguish, and false hope. That’s the anticipation of Ms. Simon’s song. That’s the anticipation that seeps into our psyche and turns our focus to the good old days of a bygone era. That’s the anticipation that blurs our focus so much that the only image we see are the diminishing returns of an unknown future. On the other hand, you have the anticipation accompanied with a readiness and assurance that produces activity and not apathy. This is the type of anticipation the Christian has, because we have the Holy Spirit. Paul says that we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, meaning we have a foretaste of the glory that is to come. It’s just a tiny morsel and it won’t cure us of our infection of sin. But that tiny taste is enough to sustain us in our waiting. It is enough to empower us to say “No” to sin. This glimpse of our adoption is enough for us to have hope. And it is hope that gets us through the labor pains of this world. It is hope that will help us through affliction and suffering. I’m not saying you won’t experience terrible things. I’m not saying you’ll instantly be healed of cancer or dementia. I can’t even promise that those things will be wiped away before you or I die. But I can promise you that there is an eternity that awaits those in Christ, an eternity that is cancer-free, oppression-free, sin-free.

But we have to wait. This isn’t the first time Paul speaks of waiting patiently, and he isn’t the only Apostle to do so, either. When the apostles speak of waiting patiently, they are not saying we are to wait stoically and carelessly, doing nothing but passively letting wickedness wash over us. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, “I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control.”⁴ The Apostle here is using a metaphor from

the world of athletics. The race the athlete runs is akin to the race of the Christian life. The Christian life isn't one spent on the sidelines, rather, we are out there, too, running. The only difference is why we run this race. It's not for selfish gains, but for glory to God. This same refrain is picked up by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. There, the Apostle encourages his readers to "run with endurance the race that is set before us."⁵ As a matter of fact, the word translated here as "endurance" is the same word Paul uses in our Romans passage that is translated as "patience."

To have endurance or patience does not mean letting yourself get bowled over or conquered by sin. Instead, we endure by standing our ground against iniquity. That's true endurance. The dictionary defines patience as the bearing of provocation and misfortune *without* the loss of temper or the like.⁶ We Christians are not to lose our cool when it appears sin has the upper hand. We're not to go crazy and be overcome. Instead, our hope should remind us that, in reality, sin does not win. Wickedness does not have the final say. And that, my sisters and brothers, should encourage us to push back against sin in this world. We push against sin in our personal lives through the process of sanctification or mortifying the flesh. We push against sin in our communal lives through the process of defending the poor and outcast. The patiently waiting Christian is not a passive do-nothing, but an active participant in the spreading of the good news of hope delivered to the co-heirs of Christ. Let us live in that active anticipation as we await the fullness of our adoption.

Please join me in prayer. Holy God, today and every day, we find ourselves waiting, anticipating your coming again in glory. We know that during this wait, we will be afflicted by many woes and temptations. But we are heirs with Christ, adopted sons and daughters of the Father. O Holy Spirit, open our eyes to the eternal truth of our adoption. Shield us from the seduction to place our hope in the good old days of the past or to the good times of the present. Instead, turn our focus to the victory that lies ahead, so that we may be encouraged to run with endurance. As we patiently await your advent, empower us to respond to and reject the claims sin makes on our lives and in our world. In Christ's heavenly name we pray. Amen.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anticipation_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anticipation_(song))

² Matthew 24:36-44

³ James 4:15

⁴ I Corinthians 9:26-27

⁵ Hebrews 12:1

⁶ <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/patience?s=t>