

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time 2019

Fr Daniel Trott

Wisdom 18.6–9;

Hebrews 11.1–2,8–19;

Luke 12.32–48

There's a lot of talk of 'waiting' in Christianity, especially in Advent. In Advent the theme of 'waiting' for Christ to come is a useful counterpoint to the frenetic busyness of preparing for Christmas, and so quite a few sermons at that time of year advise people to slow down, to wait quietly like the pregnant Mary, and to let God do his work.

But the theme of waiting comes up at other times of year as well. Today our first reading and our gospel reading are about the period of waiting for promised salvation. In our first reading we heard of the ancient Hebrews waiting for the night of Passover, when God would free them from slavery in Egypt. We're told that 'That night was made known beforehand to our ancestors, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the

oaths in which they trusted.’ They know when salvation is coming – they just have to wait for it.

Similarly, in our gospel reading we heard Jesus reassuring his disciples that ‘it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom’, and then telling them to ‘be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet’. The salvation that they’re waiting for is the coming of the kingdom of God, but this time they *don’t* know the night or the day – ‘the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour’.

I wonder what we can say about waiting when Christmas *isn’t* just round the corner.

First of all, what is it we’re waiting for? According to the New Testament, building on parts of the Old Testament called ‘apocalyptic’, what we’re waiting for is the coming of the kingdom of God, when God will give justice to victims and the unfairness of this world will be addressed. This is the kingdom Jesus is promising when he says:

Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh. (Luke 6.20–21)

And Jesus doesn't just mean heaven – the kingdom of God he proclaims is 'very near', it's the power of God breaking into this world. Jesus preached about this kingdom, and heralded it by going around healing, casting out demons, welcoming sinners, and celebrating God's mercy. Through these words and actions those who most needed to hear this good news – the poor, the hungry, the grief-stricken – were set free and given hope.

But although it 'broke in' here and there in these experiences of salvation, the kingdom didn't come in all its fullness, and still it hasn't come. In the words of the Christmas carol:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;

beneath the angel-strain have rolled
two thousand years of wrong [...]

The poor are still among us. In my parish I see people who can't find work, who become trapped in debt, who need to use food banks, who struggle for years with grief, who can't escape addiction, who come out of prison and want so much to get back to normal life but find the system is against them at every step...

What do we do, faced with this tension between the promised kingdom of God and the injustice and suffering we see all around us? Do we just wait – loving our neighbour, of course, but basically keeping our head down? Do we just look on, waiting for God to act in his own good time?

Hear what Jesus said in the second part of our gospel reading: 'Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives.' Jesus proclaimed and worked for the kingdom, and after his death and resurrection we see his apostles carrying on with many of the same acts – preaching, healing, casting out demons. The Father sends the Holy Spirit on the

church so that we can continue the work of Jesus – heralding the kingdom of God by proclaiming it and making it real in small anticipations, small liberations.

Some people get very worried that Christians who believe in this sort of ‘activism’ are trying to bring in the kingdom in their own strength – it can look presumptuous, trying to play God. But – as we do so often – we’re forgetting the Holy Spirit, God working within us. If you believe, as I do, that the Holy Spirit is behind every movement towards the kingdom of God, every partial freeing of humanity from sin, poverty, oppression, then the work of Spirit-filled people (Christian or not) for God’s kingdom *is* the work of God, through his Spirit.

As Christians we wait for the kingdom of God. But we don’t *just* wait – we wait in hope. And if we have a hope, a hope for a humanity free from all that enslaves it, then how can we not try to realize that hope? If you feel that restlessness, that impatience, it isn’t something to be ashamed of – it’s God’s Spirit teaching

us to want what God wants and work for what God works for. It's God's Spirit teaching our hearts to long for the treasure that is his kingdom.

‘Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. [...] [...] where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’