

-Isaiah 35:1-10 -Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55 -James 5:7-10 -Matthew 11:2-11

“Are you the one, or should we keep waiting?”

1. The passages today speak in a way of the art of waiting and the virtue of patience
 - a. Sady the reality is that in our modern world we’re always trying to turn the notion of waiting into a science and turn patience into a quaint old-timey virtue
 - b. Living or visiting a big city and relying on public transportation used to mean a particular kind of waiting
 - i. I remember bus timetable pamphlets for buses in Indy (or a similar timetable online), and as a rider trying to figure out the timing for a connection from one route to a second one.
 - ii. The timetable listed major bus stops and the times when the bus was supposed to be there
 - iii. Or the L in Chicago, where we’d be assured that during weekdays the trains ran every 20 minutes or so.
 - iv. And so you took it all in faith, and you would wait at the bus stop or at the train platform and hope that the bus or train was running on time
 - v. But listen, decades before that, I remember taking the bus in Monterrey, my home town, with no timetables, and you were just hoping for the best. And it would make me so mad if the bus was taking forever, and then a bus goes by super full, followed shortly by a half empty second bus (because they had gotten bunched up)!
 - c. Today? Waiting for a bus or a train in a big city is a different experience.
 - i. Subways stations and bus stops now are all fancy, and there is a digital display that tells you how many minutes before the next bus or train is arriving
 - ii. There are even apps you can have on your phone with the same information
 - iii. Columbus has a bus app that tells you where your bus is in real time!
 - iv. I suppose we’ve been used to that kind of information when we’re waiting to board a flight
 - v. We may not like it when there is a delay, but generally we have apps that tell us where that incoming flight is coming from and when it is likely to arrive

- vi. The downside, of course, is that we begin to have a sense of entitlement about knowing WHEN things are going to happen, and so much of the technological advances keep us from exercising a healthy sense of patience
2. John the Baptist sat in a cold, dark jail, and wondered if the wait for the Messiah was really over or whether he (and the rest of the people) had to keep waiting
- a. The Gospel gives us no details, but we can fill in a little of the backstory to this part of the narrative
 - i. John had baptized Jesus, and had seen the Spirit descend on him, and had heard the voice of God saying “this is my beloved son in whom I’m well pleased!”
 - ii. Surely John knew that Jesus was the one. It had to be him. But the one for what? John was starting to have some concerns.
 - iii. John (and his disciples) knew what Jesus was teaching and doing.
 - iv. They had assumed that the Messiah, the one God was sending to bring them freedom, was going to do so with the kind of political and military might that would finally get Rome’s boot off their necks.
 - v. Or I suppose Rome’s sandal off their necks?
 - vi. Either way, that wasn’t happening... yet.
 - vii. John had laid it all on the line to prepare the way for Jesus, and had even made enemies with King Herod for speaking truth to power, so now John sat in jail awaiting his execution
 - viii. Due to the cruel conditions of Roman jails, John’s disciples would have visited him often in jail, likely finding him chained, and they’d bring him the bare necessities (food, blankets, etc.); they would have been his communication line to the external world.
 - ix. The one message we know is carried from John’s prison cell was a simple question to be asked of Jesus: John wanted to know "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"
 - x. I’m sitting at the bus stop. I see a bus coming. It’s too far to tell if it’s my bus. Is this it, or do I have to stay here and wait patiently, eagerly for my bus?
 - b. The message Jesus sends back is in part straight forward, and in part coded message
 - i. "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

- ii. To John's disciples, part of the message was: you've been looking for the wrong signals, friends. You've seen all this healing and not reported it as a sign of the realm of God.
 - iii. What's more, you're missing how the most vulnerable among us are being embraced with good news of God's love and community.
 - iv. And, reading between the lines, John would have understood that the revolution that he expected had indeed already arrived, right under the noses of those who were in power. His bus was here.
 - 1. The Realm of God didn't look like they'd expected, and the way God was changing things was going to be like what the prophets of old had declared:
 - 2. that God was going to take the side of the people pushed aside by those who wielded power to hurt, not to heal.
- 3. Years after that conversation, James was still trying to answer a similar question to those he wrote to in the passage we read: How long will our wait be? When is Jesus coming back?
 - a. Be patient, James advises, which is such a frustrating request, because we can't just manufacture patience out of thin air
 - b. But the context of his statement is a larger call to care for one another
 - c. James had already given his audience some clear direction as a congregation, which goes along with the request for patience.
 - i. "Care for orphans and widows in their distress" (1:27)
 - ii. "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom? But you have dishonored the poor" (2:5-6)
 - iii. "Pray over [the sick] anointing them with oil" (5:14)
 - d. I hope you notice the parallels here.
 - i. If someone in the church to which James was writing were to ask: So, are we in the right place or do we keep looking?
 - ii. Well, look around at what ministry is taking place (and the places where you need to do better in caring for the poor and vulnerable)
 - e. It's a message for us as well, then, that in this season of Advent, a season of preparation, we need to ask ourselves a variation of what John the Baptist asked: Are WE the ones that people are waiting for? Or better yet, what are we doing to match the signs Jesus pointed to?
- 4. Just in case you're wondering, I haven't forgotten that this is the Sunday of Joy
 - a. When we look around and ponder
 - i. how our Advent is preparing our hearts and minds
 - ii. how our actions try to follow the example of Jesus

- b. We have reason to celebrate and feel joyful, not because we've got our act together in this preparation period, in this time of waiting, but because like John's disciples and James, we're being invited to focus on the progress we're making and have still to come
 - i. We welcome our hungry neighbors for a meal, though we have a ways to go to ensure our elected officials maintain a strong social safety net
 - ii. We are working to build housing options for our unhoused neighbors, though we have a ways to go to help everyone around us see them truly as neighbors
 - iii. We endeavor to welcome all people, and we need to learn from one another and our journeys
- 5. There is joy in being there for each other, especially for our neighbors who struggle. There is joy in receiving the care of those who look after us and pray for us. There is joy in the preparation and waiting for God's realm to be fully here. There is joy in becoming the community Jesus taught us to be.

Reflection Questions

1. Share a personal story of patience (when you had it or you didn't).
2. In Matthew 11:2-11, Jesus shares a list to answer John's question of whether Jesus was the one they had been waiting for. What do you think John and his disciples got from the response?
3. How do we as a church show the world that Jesus was the one we were all waiting for?

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-of-advent/commentary-on-matthew-112-11-7>

https://cdn.bakerpublishinggroup.com/processed/esource-assets/files/1960/original/23.6.Prison_Conditions_in_the_Roman_World.pdf?1525182932

Third Sunday of Advent - December 14, 2025

JOY

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