

“Be patient therefore beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient”.

I think it is human nature to recoil when we hear the words “be patient”. Children show this very clearly with their bodies, and we are lucky to have so many children here at Thankful from which to learn. When children hear the words “be patient” they groan and slouch their bodies. Or, like Toad in the story¹, they might jump up and down and yell in anger. Though we as adults might have learned to keep a straight face, we still feel the rub of frustration. There is a particularly sharp frustration this Sunday, “Gaudete” Sunday, which means “rejoice” in Latin, where instead of a reading about rejoicing the lectionary compilers give us readings about patience and doubt.

But I think the lectionary compilers are on to something. Advent is a time of preparation. Last week in their sermon, Sam helped us to think about the growth and that comes from preparation, like when we prepare the soil of a garden. As our storybook clearly demonstrated, growth takes time. If we are going to truly prepare in this season of Advent, we are also going to have to wait. As, Anglican priest and

¹ The Garden from Frog and Toad Together by Arnold Lobel: read during the Children’s sermon

theologian Sarah Coakley puts it, “‘waiting on the divine’ will involve great personal commitment and great personal risk”.²

We see this personal risk in our gospel story. It was just last week that we heard John the Baptist encouraging others to prepare a way for the Lord. His fervor for God, his commitment to making his preparations for the Messiah and preaching truth even to those with power have led to him in prison, waiting. And as his patience wanes, doubt begins to creep in. He sends his disciples to Jesus to ask if Jesus is really the Messiah, or if they should wait for another. This is the same man of whom Jesus says “among those born of women, none has arisen greater than John the Baptist”, yet even this man of God has lost patience and doubted. Waiting is hard. Waiting for God is hard. It is human nature to lose patience and doubt, particularly when we have followed all the rules, or prayed diligently, or gone to church faithfully, or tried our hardest to love both our neighbor and our enemy, and we still don’t see the change that we want in in ourselves or in the world.

When this happens, and patience is lost and doubt creeps in, what shall we do? When John expresses his doubt, Jesus sends disciples to tell John the stories of what they have seen, that he might hear and have faith.³ So, too, for us. We have stories to hear and stories to tell. We hear the stories of Jesus on Sunday to remind

² Astley, Brown, Loades (ed), *Christology Reader*, 94 (from *Kenosis and Subversion*)

³ Idea from “Has it all been for Nothing?” by Debie Thomas, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3509>

of us of God's love for us and of our Christian vocation. And we can share our own stories with one another, that we might remember how the Holy Spirit works through our community right now, changing our hearts and calling us to grow into a fuller life in Christ. Stories are particularly important, because like a garden, change is not immediate but gradual.

When we tell stories, it gives us the opportunity to remember what was: to look back to the seeds that were planted in our lives, where they sprouted, the weeding that we have done, and how far they have come. When we hear stories, we can see our own growth in new light: we realize that others are dealing with the same weeds or sins that we are, and that maybe our growth isn't that slow but completely normal. And when we hear other's stories, we are encouraged in Christ: we hear of new weeding techniques that might be more effective than our own, or others might remind us of how beautiful our garden is, when our eyes can only see weeds. Stories remind us, encourage us, and uplift us in our life in Christ.

And so, I'd like to share with you a story of growth and change:

Previously in my life I was a music therapist. My very first client after gaining my board certification was an adult with autism. He was non-verbal, and spent a lot of his life watching Disney movies and pacing. After a few weeks of working together, I noticed that though he could not communicate verbally, he could sing

every word to every Disney song. This intrigued me and so I began to put short, common phrases to music that he could practice singing them. Year after year, we made music together, he joined a music therapy group as well and made music with others. He learned songs on the piano using adaptive means and could hold a beat unlike any other client I had. When I was pregnant with Clive and about to step away from my Music Therapy work, I sat down with the music therapist who was taking my caseload to discuss each client's goals. It was only then that I realized how far my original client had come. After 6 years of work, he could walk into a room and say "good morning" to those in the group without prompting. He could answer the question "how are you" in at least a word or two. And he could verbally communicate choices that he wanted to make in the therapy session. Transformation had been happening, but my eyes missed it until I stopped to tell his story.

In the last six months, I have seen beautiful and gradual growth here at Thankful. I have seen parents supporting one another in raising children in faith. I have felt each of you uplift my own growth as I begin to feel more comfortable preaching and serving at the altar. I have seen the community come together in love after the loss of Thankful ones, and as you learned of the King's families impending move. I have heard seeds of good works being planted in vestry meetings, seeds that I will never get to see to their fullest growth.

At some point this Advent, I encourage you to ponder your own story both personally and as a community. What did your faith journey look like five years ago, ten years ago, twenty years ago. What has worked for you? What hasn't worked for you? What people encouraged you along the way? What relationships have come to an end? Where have you seen God working in your life? Tell your story: Write it down in a journal or share part of it in fellowship while we drink coffee and tea next door. Allow your own story and the story of others to uplift your spirit that we might all "rejoice" as we prepare for the return of our Savior.

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