

7th Sunday after Pentecost, yr., 7/19/2020
Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:18-25; Matthew 13:24-30
Waiting with Eager Longing – Rev. Dr. Deborah M. Jenks

“... the creation itself waits with eager longing ... if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8: 19, 25)

I can find waiting with patience as Paul exhorts is a very hard thing to do. “Be patient.” “Wait your turn.” “Just wait a minute.” Or, as my dad used to say when I was little, “Hold your horses.” The exhortation to be patient, to wait, is given to us over and over again from the time we are very young. It’s probably something we hear before we are even consciously aware of the meaning of what we’re hearing. The need to wait, to be patient, arises in our lives the moment when we are usually very little and our needs and expectations are not immediately fulfilled. We are forced to wait. Wait, because our needs, our desires are, for some mysterious inexplicable reason, not as important or as urgent as those of someone else.

Very early in our lives the eager longing which fills our souls bumps up against the need to wait for its fulfillment. And so conflict and suffering are born into our world and into our souls. We are tempted, and we often give into to the temptation, to impatiently try to make our own dreams come true, to have our own way, have things go our way, no matter what it might cost others. Maybe sometimes not even thinking of the cost.

From the time they were together in their mother's womb, Jacob and his brother Esau were at war with one another. Jacob was born grasping at the heel of his firstborn brother. Impatient for the fulfillment of his needs and later God's promises concerning him, Jacob acts to displace his older brother. He tricks Esau into selling him his inheritance – his birthright as the firstborn. And then Jacob steals Esau's blessing from their father Isaac.

Jacob works hard to make things happen in fulfillment of his deep need and desire, and his understanding of his destiny. He is impatient, anxious to come into his own – to grow up. But, after all his maneuverings and actions, just when it seems as if he had all that he needs for the fulfillment of all that he desires, it all turns to ashes. For in taking for himself what would meet his deepest longings, he has caused his brother Esau to hate him, hate him so much that he seeks to kill his brother Jacob.

Jacob is forced to leave his home and family and set out alone, to go to the land of his mother's brother Laban. Somewhere between Beer-Sheba and Haran, Jacob comes to a certain place, a place that is no place, alone, without protection or support, banished and far from home. As night falls he takes one of the stones on the ground, puts it under his head and lies down.

Have you ever found yourself lying in bed in the deepest darkness of the night feeling as if you had a stone for a pillow? Tossing and turning, restless,

unable to make things right, unable to quite believe that everything is going to be all right, fearful, anxious about what the day may bring? Those times when maybe even praying the Serenity Prayer –God grant me the grace to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference – fails to bring calm to the soul?

Jesus tells us this parable: The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while he was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat ... And the servants of the householder came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where did these weeds come from? ... Do you want us to go and pull the weeds up?” But he replied, “No, don’t do that, for in pulling the weeds you will uproot the wheat along with them. Wait, and let both grow until the harvest.”

We human beings can be very impatient. We want reasonable, unequivocal, clear “yes” and “no” answers. When our living and this world present us with a mixture of good and not-so-good; we, like the householder’s servants, become perplexed, edgy, uncertain. Impatient with ambiguity, we seek to immediately separate the good from the not-so-good, the right from the wrong. We seek to judge for ourselves, and act on our judgments. But for some reason, God doesn’t seem too upset or surprised about the weeds. God urges us, in Paul’s words, to “hope for what we do not see, (and) wait for it with patience.”

Lying on his pillow of stone, Jacob dreamed. He dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

Mostly our dreaming goes only one way. We try to catch an angel who will take a message from us up to God, convey our wishes from earth to heaven. Jacob's been sending the same message to God for a long time, "God make me ... God give me ... God get me ... " We can find ourselves doing the same thing in our prayers. We mostly talk about ourselves and our needs, the fulfillment of our dreams and desires. But like Jacob, we soon discover that as we make judgments concerning our dreams and act on them, as soon as we try to make things go our way, we find that separating the good from the bad is not an easy thing to do. We can find ourselves pulling up wheat along with the weeds.

Our scriptures tell us that only God can make such judgments. And in the right time, God's own time, it will be done. In the meantime, we need to be more patient, patient with one another and with what we don't know or understand. This kind of patience is often difficult; it takes a lot of practice. But the good news is that God is infinitely, unendingly patient with us. If God were not so patient, God would have given up on us and all creation a long time ago!

"Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.", says Jacob. (Gen. 28:16) Some times even with our impatience and anxiety and fearfulness, – in

God's time and because God is patient – we get glimpses ... we recognize what we did not know. This recognition I think requires of us a kind of humility, a humility of patience ... waiting in eager longing, hoping for what we do not yet see as Paul tells us in Romans. (Rom. 8:19, 25)

I was pondering all this when I came across this passage in a book I just started by Terry Tempest Williams *The Hour of Land; A Personal Topography of America's National Parks*. In the introduction I read: "It has been said there are two stories in the world: an individual goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town. I am ... adding a third, a story of homecoming ... bound to the nature of our own humility, our capacity to stay open and curious in a world that instead beckons closure through fear. For me, humility begins as a deep recognition of all I do not know. ... it inspires me to ask more questions, to look more closely, feel more fully the character of the place where I am." (p. 12-13)

As the angels of God ascend Jacob's ladder with our prayers, they are also descending with God's Word, God's love, God's forgiveness and blessing. As Jacob journeys toward what is unknown to him, Jacob dreams. In Jacob's dream God comes very near to him, stands beside him. In Jesus, God comes near to us and stands beside us, and promises to accompany us always on our way. God says to Jacob, "Know that I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised." And with these words, with God's reassuring, loving, forgiving presence, our impatience, fear, and anxiety begin to ease, our separateness and

strangeness to each other and to God is transformed into homecoming, into community – into a family of faith in which, as Paul says, we are all children of God.

Jacob wakes from his sleep and in awe and humility realizes that this ordinary place is none other than the place where heaven and earth meet. And he is able to make a new beginning, to start anew as God's child. Amen.

Source quoted: Williams, Terry Tempest, *The Hour of Land: A Personal Topography of America's National Parks*. 2016.