

## **Dreghorn and Springside Parish Church**

### **Second Sunday of Advent 2020**

#### **Bible Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-15 (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup>But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

<sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

<sup>11</sup>Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup>as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup>But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

<sup>14</sup>So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. <sup>15</sup>Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.

#### **Sermon: Living purposefully while we wait**

As Christmas approaches, I wonder: How patient are you when it comes to waiting? Will you, for example, patiently eat one chocolate per day from your Advent calendar, or were they all scoffed by Wednesday? Are you holding back putting up your tree until just before Christmas or has COVID given you just the perfect to have it there already?! And when it's there, can you resist having a sneaky look at the presents under the tree? Are you saving those special Christmas films to savour over the holidays, or are they already watched? This week we continue into Advent with the theme of waiting but waiting is so hard, particularly when we're used to having everything readily available at the touch of a button.

Last week we talked about Jesus' second coming - the Bible's promise that Jesus will return and bring the fullness of his Kingdom on earth. But many of us can struggle with that idea. It has been around 2000 years since Jesus returned to heaven, so it is understandable that some give up hope that God will ever return and put this earth right.

So, the very first Christians were asking where is Jesus, why hasn't he come back yet? And if they were asking that question just years after his ascension, we might feel justified in asking the same question now that almost 2000 year have passed. Peter's first response to the early Christian's question was quite brilliant, he wrote: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient..." (2 Peter 3:9).

A friend of mine belonged to a family who all ate together but they wolfed down their food, before bomb-bursting back out into their busy lives. But then one of the daughters of the family started going out with a boy whose folks chewed slowly on every single morsel and event talked between delicate mouthfuls. She struggled, as they savoured every bite. Knowing that God is patient and prepared to wait should challenge the hurriedness of our modern lives.

Do you feel like you rush from one thing to the next? Are you always looking for the fastest check-out queue at the supermarket? Do you get frustrated with the long COVID queue snaking around the shop or the wait for a vaccine? Do you get annoyed when your computer seems to take forever-and-a-day to boot up and download, or your child dawdles over putting on their shoes? Maybe we need to learn, that what might feel like slowness to us can, at the same time, be a lesson in godly patience. Peter tells us that God has a vital reason why he is holding back his return: "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Peter knew that the final return of Jesus would come with judgement over the earth. Jesus cross and resurrection mean that when we are in him - we have no fear of judgement. But entering into God's Kingdom does require us to believe in him and come to him in repentance. For this reason, God is patiently holding back the return of Christ, so that everyone on earth has the chance to respond to his gift of forgiveness and restoration. Peter describes God's judgement like this: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3:10).

At our Forge Pioneer Course that Aylice, Alison, Joanne and I are participating in, we learned at our last weekend that there are various reasons this passage has been misunderstood to mean that God is going to destroy the earth. This has fed the mistaken idea that the Christian hope consists only of a spiritual heaven. But that idea ignores the wider biblical picture that Peter is drawing on, the promise of Isaiah of a new heaven and new earth (65:17, 66:22). So, Peter spells out: "in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:13). This is the same new heaven and new earth that John sees in Revelation 21:1-2, a favourite reading of hope at funerals, where we read: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."

The important question is - what kind of "new" are these writers describing? There is a Greek word *neo* which means "new" in the sense that it didn't exist before. But this isn't the word used in these passages. Peter and Revelation both use the word *kainos*, which means having a new quality about it - being "renewed" or "remade". It is the same word which describes our transformation as Christians in 2 Corinthians 5:17 - you are a new (*kainos*) creation. The old sinful, broken life has gone, the renewed holy, restored life has come. So the picture Peter is painting here is of God's final judgement burning up all that is unjust, impure, ungodly, laying bare the earth until the old "order" of things has been destroyed and the original intention of God has been restored. In Revelation, the City of God comes down from heaven to earth, "the old order of things has passed away" and God promises to be with us on this restored planet forever.

When you are waiting for something, knowing what you are waiting for changes how you wait. A child waiting for a Christmas present has a different attitude to a child waiting for the dentist. You wait for your wedding day in a very different way to waiting to hear if your car passed the MOT. We are not waiting for an eternity sitting on clouds playing harps, or an endless church service, or an infinite sermon (heaven forbid!). We are waiting for the restoration of heaven and earth, with every good thing made new and abundant life for all. Knowing what God will do when Jesus returns ought to change how we live today. Peter writes: "Since everything [of the old order of things] will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming... So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." (2 Peter 3:11-12,14, comment added).

Since this is our ultimate goal, Peter says, here is how we should live. We should live in ways which please God, which imitate Jesus, which work for the good of his creation, which are not confined within church walls but out in the community building up others, shaping society, seeking, peace and healing, justice and fairness. Communicating the Kingdom of God in how we speak and how we live - so not only proclaim it, but even somehow to "speed its coming". Amen.

**Prayer:** Come Lord Jesus come, millions do not know you and to us who do, what difference does it make? What is the point of your presence, if our lives do not alter? Come Lord Jesus come, come and change our lives, shatter our complacency. Make your word flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood and our life's purpose. Take away the quietness of a clear conscience. Press us uncomfortably. For only in this is that other peace made, your peace. Amen.

**Jamie Milliken**

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