

November 30, 2025

“The Wilderness of Waiting”

Isaiah 40:25-31

How many of us have recently found ourselves **waiting**?

At a red light or grocery store . . .

In line for a Black Friday deal

In an airport TSA line

For a college acceptance letter/scholarship award

For an Associate Pastor . . . **Welcome, Josh!**

How many of us are/will be **waiting** for something specifically connected to Christmas?

Present

Christmas/Year End bonus

Invitation to dinner somewhere

Family to arrive safely or your own safe arrival somewhere

Family to behave better when everyone’s together

How many of us feel like we are chronically waiting?

Not at a red light or in line at Home Depot but . . .

To be asked out on a date, noticed

For a burden to be lifted (“Come to Me . . .”)

For test results . . . so many test results

For a relationship to improve

For a change in your own behavior

An end to your anger outbursts

Victory over addiction or destructive habit

How many of us feel like we’re waiting on God?

For an answered prayer

For direction and guidance in a personal matter

For provision

For a miracle

To bring us to a better place

Nobody likes to wait.

We’re just not very good at it, are we?

Waiting in the Wilderness is even worse.

But the Wilderness is a place we all find ourselves sooner or later. One's sense of being in a Wilderness will vary from person to person and season to season, but it's a metaphor which resonates whether we choose to use the term or not. To be clear, when we say "Wilderness" we don't mean the outdoorsy, Colorado, National Park kind of wilderness. The Wilderness in Biblical times meant an isolated and dangerous wasteland; not a safe and serene place, but a vulnerable place. A biblical Wilderness is a place nobody signs up to stay in for very long. It's a reality we can't wait to end. This is what exile felt like for the Israelites.

Now, put together the discomfort of Wilderness and our dislike for Waiting, and you have the perfect recipe for some serious complaining. No matter where or when we are located, every human being has a high capacity for complaint. We quite naturally notice where we aren't yet or what we don't yet have. And we almost never keep it to ourselves.

Phrases like "I can't wait until" show up in our conversations. So do those closely-related statements that start with "If only" or include questions that begin with "How much longer?" (as in "How much longer will I be stuck here?") or "When will?" . . . or even "Where are You, God?"

Isaiah 40:27 gives us a clue as to what the Israelites were complaining about while in Babylonian captivity. "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God'?" Where they were and how long they had been there were wearing down their faith. The waiting and the wilderness were taking their toll. They were getting tired of waiting on God.

Can you relate to the complaint that God doesn't seem to be anywhere in sight?

That He doesn't seem to be standing up for you?

That He may be strong, but you feel weak?

God, through the prophet Isaiah, isn't afraid to acknowledge and address His people's complaints. He's been listening; is more than aware of where they are and how long they've been there. Exile was His decision.

But more than focusing on complaining – which we're allowed to do with God (it IS a form of Biblical prayer called Lament) – [beyond lamenting] it's important to 'move on' and change our focus to the God we are complaining to: who He is, what He's like and what He's already done.

Verses 25, 26 and 28 remind us that the God we are waiting on and complaining to has "no equal." That He "created all the stars" and "calls them each by name;" that He is "great in

strength and mighty in power;” that He “is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. [That] He doesn’t faint or grow weary . . . [That] His understanding is unsearchable.”

If there is anything good that comes from having to wait, it’s that – sooner or later – the odds go up we’ll eventually start thinking more about who God is than where we find ourselves stuck and what we find ourselves without. And when that starts to happen the odds also go up that our souls become more open to and intent upon looking for where God is and what God has in store for those who wait for Him.

One of the most often quoted parts of Isaiah goes like this: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:28-31)

When we slow down and wait for the One who created all that is and never grows tired, we are more likely to find ourselves surprised, enlarged and strengthened – even when we find ourselves in the Wilderness of Waiting.

This is why Advent is a great place to find ourselves. Here in Advent, we wait for an arrival. Not the arrival of just anyone or any place, but for Messiah; the only One who can save us from the messes and places in which we keep finding ourselves. During Advent, we can choose to focus – not on where we are NOT or what we DON’T have – but on who God is and what He’s capable of doing again and again.

It’s not like we don’t know God arrived in the flesh 2,000 years ago. We know what happens at the end of Matthew 1 or the middle of Luke 2. But, in Advent, we don’t rush to the climax of the story; to the babe born in Bethlehem; to “Silent Night, Holy Night.” Instead, we wait just like everyone had to wait in exile and in Roman occupied Palestine.

We wait with Elizabeth and Zechariah in the wilderness of childlessness. We wait with Joseph for a clue from God that will help him make sense of Mary’s apparent betrayal. We wait with Mary to see how God’s going to pull off this crazy plan, how her parents and Joseph are going to react, and whether or not her elderly relative Elizabeth is really 6 months pregnant. We wait with the Israelites who find themselves living once again under another tyrannical ruler. We wait with shepherds in the lonely wilderness – where their jobs barely allow them to pay the bills. We wait while attempting to discipline ourselves to think about the faithful One who kept His promises in the past.

And we do all of this **together**, while waiting with anticipation for the Second Advent/Arrival of the Gentle and Lowly Savior, who will finally lead us out of the Wilderness and make all things new.

Do you feel stuck?

Are you waiting for God to come through?

To move you along?

Get you out of the Wilderness?

Maybe you are frustrated in your Wilderness of Waiting; maybe a bit like Elizabeth, Zechariah, Mary and Joseph; waiting for resolution, reconciliation, provision and rest from your weariness. And maybe . . . you're exactly where you need to be; in a place where a surprising and unlikely arrival awaits you.