

The Second Sunday of Advent
Church of the Holy Cross
December 7, 2014
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God's Patience

Zounds! Strewth! Blimey! Gadzooks! 'sblood! Zooterkins! Swounds!

This past week, I discovered the name for these fabulous words. These are *minced oaths*.

Most of them have interesting backstories, although sadly, none of them were actually pronounced the way that I am saying them, for I have an American accent instead of a cool accent.

All the above minced oaths that I just named are typically used to express anger, surprise, or assertion. "Zounds! The cat just threw up his special prescription food on the floor!" "Gadzooks! The plumbing has burst a pipe and none of us know where the break is!" "Oh, zooterkins! That guy took my special reserved underground parking space!"

Minced oaths... A great way to not express the disappointment and frustration that I actually feel. A way to hide my anger behind funny words.

In the midst of my disappointment and frustrations, I am faced with God's patience in the epistle. Today, after yet another week of protests and racism and non-indictments and broken pipes and long budget meetings, we are blessed with the promise of God's incredible patience with us in humanity. God gives us time to become the best version of ourselves.

The population to which Peter wrote, in his epistle, dwelt far enough after the Crucifixion and Resurrection that they were beginning to grow impatient. They were removed from the immediacy of Jesus' presence. The excitement had waned. Followers were dying of simple old age before the Great Second Coming which they thought they'd be alive to see. In the face of persecution, and boredom and normal life, they'd become frustrated with this faith. Sound familiar? They were naturally beginning to ask the questions of whether this promised Kingdom of Heaven would even be worth the wait, and what to do with our time now? Peter promises that God's patience is a great mercy to a world that is torn and hurting.

Peter goes to great lengths to describe that God's promise is not slow. He describes what could sound like a formula: a day is like 1000 years, and indeed, we could have great fun with attempting to calculate exactly how many years it will be until God's return. All that, however, is mental gymnastics. I won't say we can believe only if $X+Y=Z$ sigma times pi squared. (I'll let the engineers make sense out of that formula.) the whole timing is a simile, not a formula. Our faith is grounded in Jesus Christ, the fount of all mercy. God is not slow, but patient. The bible isn't a book of formulas and logic, but a book of hope, of God's hope as heard and interpreted by people with their hopes and dreams. God is patient so that his hope for humanity to continually become closer to him can be realized.

God hopes to redeem all creation. God hopes to see us create a just and beautiful world. This is where we get to talk a little bit about the difference between hopes and wishes. I usually discuss the text with my staff in our staff meetings each week, and the parish administrator had been reading Brian McLaren's latest book, *We Make the Road By*

Walking. Wishing is when we envision what our life would be like if we had a million dollars. But without a plan, without action, our wishes are merely beating the air. Meanwhile, when we hope, we plan. If I hope to have a million dollars, I'd take actions to make that happen. Hoping inspires what we do in our lives to achieve our goals, and hope in Christ is about what we do with our life as God's people to build God's kingdom come. God is patient with us, because God hopes for us to become a people who are filled with justice, who respect the dignity of every human being, who strive for justice and peace, who seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. The action that God took to realize that hope sent Jesus to be our messiah, and continues to send the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

Sometimes the hope doesn't seem to work all that well. We all experience frustration, desperation, disappointment when our hopes do not measure up to our dreams. Last week, you heard last week, in the sermon, I expressed a great frustration and disappointment with our society not just because of the outcome of the Ferguson case, but because we were demonizing *OTHER HUMANS* on the basis of skin color. I hope to see a more equal society in my lifetime, and I hope for a world where we never call another human being by names that dishonor their humanity. Calling a group of rioters thugs and animals falls short of my hope for humanity. Calling refugees from a natural disaster cattle falls short of my hope for humanity. Calling our enemies who are trying to kill us using IEDs by names that are slurs about their headgear... Also falls short of my hope for humanity. One of my hopes for humanity is that we will learn to recognize our equality before god and to honor the divine spark in each soul. Insisting on calling each other by our names and by human terms... That is an action we can take to remind ourselves constantly of our own humanity.

Now I understand that it makes some of us uncomfortable to talk about this, ever, but especially in church. I understand it makes us uncomfortable when I mention things like riots and race and discord. I have this super stylish collar and I'm sitting up here. I have more power right now, as the speaker. This is not a conversation. This isn't a fair setup. On the other hand, wouldn't I be remiss if I did not look at the current events in our society and try to discuss them in context with our faith? If I did not do that, the sermon would be nothing more than a nice white lady talking about a dusty book written and approved by dead men. Our faith is stronger, and more alive, than that. God's hope for us is much deeper than a hope that we will study a dry book without expecting that we will also be transformed in our souls and in our life with others.

I was reminded of this strongly, yesterday, at the ordination of Elizabeth Keeler, who was my seminarian last year and who now serves at Christ Church Georgetown, and her cohort. The priests were charged to be men and women of prayer, and study, and action. They were charged with cares for their people, and with cares for this world. I was reminded that these were vows I had also taken. And I am reminded that in Advent, we ask God to stir up in us the ancient powers that move in us to transform this world. We in our prayers ask God to transform us!

This is where God's grace comes home. We do not live in a perfect society. And we would be in big, big trouble if God's return were scheduled for, say, yesterday. First of all, I began this during the week, and if the world ended, then it would definitely impact Elizabeth's ordination to the priesthood, and I would be quite put out. Secondly, if God returned yesterday, we would all be in big trouble. We have in so many ways fallen short of where God hopes for us to be.

That is why we are so fortunate, and so blessed, and so beloved, by God's aching slowness. This is what Peter means when he teaches us that God is not slow. God is

instead patient. God hopes for a universal salvation, where each of us, here in Dunn Loring, in the government offices, in the hospitals, in the police departments, in the streets, in the tenements, in the mansions, in the Capitol, in the far reaches of Oregon, in the sun-scorched and bomb-scarred lands of Jerusalem, in the green hills of Scotland, and in the sandy deserts of Afghanistan, God hopes for us all to come to repentance and to live the holy and blessed life designed for each of us. God hopes for every human to receive grace and to give grace. God's action for that was sending us Jesus, born in the vulnerable form of a human baby, and awaking our souls with the Holy Spirit.

God hopes for each of us to know how deeply we are loved, and to be a people of action to share that love with others in all the dark places that we walk.