



“How Long We Have Waited”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Psalm 89 (excerpts)

You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.

⁴⁰ You have broken through all his walls; you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

⁴¹ All who pass by plunder him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors.

⁴² You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴³ Moreover, you have turned back the edge of his sword, and you have not supported him in battle.

⁴⁴ You have removed the scepter from his hand,^[f] and hurled his throne to the ground.

⁴⁵ You have cut short the days of his youth; you have covered him with shame. *Selah*

⁴⁶ How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁷ Remember how short my time is—^[g] for what vanity you have created all mortals!

⁴⁸ Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of Sheol? *Selah*

⁴⁹ Lord, where is your steadfast love of old, which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, how your servant is taunted; how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples,^[h] ⁵¹ with which your enemies taunt, O LORD, with which they taunted the footsteps of your anointed. ⁵² Blessed be the LORD forever. Amen and Amen.

Sermon:

It can seem surprising, even astonishing, that God and God's chosen people, hang in there with each other.

But that is the story line of the Hebrew scriptures, and the gist of today's psalm excerpt.

God creates and loves and builds relationship with God's creatures.

And the creatures, well, they don't care as much about the relationship.

And so they mess it up, repeatedly.

And God gets fed up, and disciplines them, watches them mess up and live into the consequences of their own shortsightedness, selfishness, ego, greed.

But that returning, that turning away, from the greed and selfishness and blindness and vanity of a life lived only for oneself,

The creatures do it. They beg forgiveness, they cry for mercy and love and restoration.

And God's heart softens again.

And the promises to love and to cherish are made again. Renewed, again.

Here we stand on the edge of Christmas Eve night, when we will move to celebrating the miracle of life, and the life God chooses to have with us, but we are not there yet, and the story is not of the wonder of the birth of the Christ Child, our Savior child, but we hear instead the cries and the hoping and the waiting and the wondering.

I think first of the long waiting of the Israelite people, God's chosen ones.

But then, I broaden my lens and think of all people, and all creation as a whole, groaning with the waiting. We were promised it would get better, but how long before that promise is fulfilled?

Trapped in time, waiting seems like hard work. Patience is a discipline we have to practice and practice and practice.

Imagining a future of fulfillment and renewal, of covenant relationship restored, helps us bear the waiting. And yes, even more than imagining, but beginning to try to live it, that helps us bear the waiting, too.

We are Christians. We believe the waiting is over in the life and witness of Jesus our Christ.

- Advent tells us to bear waiting with hope.
- Christmas tells us the time of waiting is fulfilled.
- Easter tells us to never, again, fear the grave, even as we await the inevitability of death.

Christians often violently disagree with one another, but I think we can all agree on those three statements.

The time of waiting is fulfilled, unexpectedly, in a baby, who grows to become a man, who dies on a cross and rises triumphant over death and horror.

What is it you are waiting for fulfillment? What is your longing? What is your hope? (discuss together)

Whatever we wait for, from now on, we no longer need to wait in the shadow of despair, in the cowering of fear.

Because God is faithful.

Because God is steadfast in love.

Because God is covenanted to us, the creatures of the creation.

A promise that God does not break.

A promise fulfilled in Jesus our Christ. To be with us, abide with us, comfort, challenge, sustain us.

To renew all creation, to build community and communion and peace on earth, good will to all.

Alleluia, and Amen!