

## Sermon by Christopher Girata

Luke 3:1-6  
(Advent 2 - Year C)  
10 December 2006

There once was a man who was very impatient. Although he was very successful in almost every way, his short temper always got the best of him. All he wanted in the world was to be a patient person, but the more he tried to be patient, the more *impatient* he became. After many failed attempts to learn patience, he decided to get serious. He decided there was only one way to conquer his greatest weakness - the man decided to become a monk. The new monk built himself a little home deep in the woods, far away from any other person. He was confident that he would finally learn to be patient.

Years later, a traveler was passing through the woods and came upon the monk in his little house. The traveler was amazed to find anyone living so far away from the rest of the world. The traveler asked the monk, "Why do you live all the way out here, all by yourself?" The monk said, "I am here to learn to be patient." The traveler said, "How long have you been out here?" *Very patiently*, the monk replied, "Seven years." Stunned and confused, the traveler asked, "But if there is no one around to bother you, how will you ever know when you have learned to be patient?" Annoyed, the monk replied, "Get away from me; I have no time for you!"

Your patience, too, may have been tested recently. Undoubtedly you have begun to witness longer lines and shorter tempers everywhere you go. It's Christmastime, after all! Time for silver bells, sleigh rides, snow angels, and crazy, panicky, hysterical people crowding every mall and store in creation! Advent, the season of preparation, has become a season of madness, with crazed holiday feelings oozing out of every building on every corner. Although decorations are in abundance, patience, unfortunately, is not. Gone are the days when patience was an aspired virtue. Couldn't we all use a little more patience in our lives?

Life calls for patience in many forms. Patience, or lack thereof, manifests itself most evidently when we have to wait for something. How good are you at waiting? Obviously,

we are all willing to wait for those things which we feel are worthy. What if I told you that you would receive something great in the future, would you wait? Even if I promised you the reward was worth your time, *would you wait?*

The Bible has many stories of promises made by God through prophets. One of the greatest prophets was Isaiah. Isaiah came on the scene as the Jewish people were in exile in Babylon. They struggled with the feeling that their God, Yahweh, had abandoned them in their time of need. As The Jews wrestled with a sense of despair, Isaiah made a promise to them. He told the Jewish people that one day God would send a savior, a messiah, who would deliver them from their despair. The messiah would turn their whole world upside down and change the course of history for the better. That sounds great, right? They would have certainly welcomed that change! There was just one catch – Isaiah promised that he would come, but he didn't tell them when. They were forced to wait. They waited, and waited, and waited. Jesus, the Messiah, would not be born for 700 more years!

Can you imagine how long 700 years actually is? Think about having to wait even one hour outside the doors of the church in order to get in. What about waiting weeks at a time to receive a letter from a family member only a few hundred miles away? Let's imagine what our world was like 700 years ago: the Great Crusades had just ended; it would be another 200 years until Columbus sails to the Americas, another 250 years until the Reformation, and another 300 years until the Bible would be translated into English! If we try to think about how much has changed in the last 700 years, we may easily be overwhelmed! Now imagine that you have heard family stories about someone who had made a promise to one of your ancestors 700 years ago. Imagine they had promised something huge, something monumental, and something that would change the world forever. Would you wait, even knowing the promise may not be fulfilled in your lifetime?

Waiting can often seem remarkably *uneventful*. Whether you're waiting for a table at a restaurant, waiting in line at your favorite store, waiting for someone in your family to get out the door...even waiting for the end of this sermon – waiting is very challenging.

Waiting can take many forms. Sometimes waiting is simply boring, like when you're

waiting for the end of the “coming attractions” so you can finally get to the movie. Sometimes waiting can be worrisome, like when you’re waiting for the results of your most recent medical exam. But sometimes, waiting can be exciting and thrilling, like when you see a gift wrapped beautifully, but can’t open the gift just yet.

Today’s Gospel lesson introduces us to John the Baptist who, like the monk, has moved far away from other people. John moved out into the desert, into the “wilderness,” to live away from others. He sought an environment where worldly temptations would not get in the way of his personal devotions. John was listening for God to speak, and wanted to be where he could hear God loud and clear. John would have gone weeks and months at a time without seeing a single person. John went out into the desert to wait for something...and his waiting paid off! Luke writes, “The word of God came to John.” The truth of God became apparent to John. He finally knew what he was meant to do – he knew he was meant to announce the coming of the greatest moment in history, the moment when Isaiah’s 700 year-old prophecy of a Messiah would be fulfilled. The wait was over, and now he needed to tell the people.

John was transformed – transformed from a private man to a public prophet. He became a man of action. John saw that focusing on his own salvation in the desert was not the purpose of his life. God’s word came upon John and redirected his life from one of solitude and personal spirituality, to one of godly service to others. He became God’s herald, announcing the advent of the Messiah, the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. There is much we can learn from John. John listened for God and heard God speak. God is still speaking today.

So what do you hear in your daily life? We typically live day to day in a mad rush of meetings, events, errands, and more. How many of us are already anxious about getting the right gift for the right person? The Christmas fever is all around, yet today we hear a story of patience, a story of waiting, a story of service. We hear a story about a man who waited for God, who heard God, and who acted for God. Too often we rush through our days without as much as a passing thought about God. How often do we stop to listen for

God's voice? Think of how much we're missing. Think of God's voice going unheard. Think of the work - of God's work - that we could do in the world, and how often we simply miss the invitation.

As we move through the next few weeks, we will all be swept up in holiday preparations from time to time. But remember - God is still speaking in unlikely ways, through unlikely people, about marvelous things. In this Advent season, take time every day to pause, be patient, and wait to hear God speak to you.

Amen.