

HURRY UP AND WAIT!
II PETER 3:8-15
DECEMBER 13, 1987

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There is a story, supposedly true, about a youth playing in his first high school varsity football game. The coach assigned him to make the opening kickoff. Before the game, he was nervous, jittery, apprehensive about his big moment. The coach repeated the instructions, "Be calm. Take your time. Keep your eye on the ball; wait for the referee's whistle; as soon as you hear the whistle, run and kick the ball for all you're worth." The young kicker followed the instructions verbatim. He kept his eye on the ball, heard the whistle, ran forward, kicked the ball off the holding tee, and sailed the ball clear down to the five-yard line. It was the best kick he had ever made. Excitedly, he ran down the field towards the ball, only to realize that he was the only one running, and besides that, the coach was yelling at him. The whistle he had heard was the band director beginning the national anthem! How hard it is to wait!

On the other hand, if you were a coach, wouldn't you prefer to have the impatient kicker, rather than one who sits on the bench and responds with a yawn when told to go on the field? Isn't there a place for impatience? Of course, some folks carry impatience to a point of irritation. Like the wife who handed her husband the children's clothes on Sunday morning and said, "Here, today you get the kids ready for church, and I'll go out and honk the horn!"

The Epistle lesson this morning from II Peter identifies a tension between waiting and hurrying, between patience and impatience. There is a time to wait. There is a time to hurry up. And often these are simultaneous. First, the lesson tells us to wait for what God has promised. II Peter 3:13, "We wait for what God has promised, new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells." That is the promise. The Day of the Lord will come, promises Peter, Christ will come with a new earth where righteousness will be at home. Isn't that an interesting image? The Good News Version translates it, "a new earth where righteousness will be at home." Righteousness means right relationships. Wouldn't it be something to live on an earth where people are in right relationship with God and in right relationships with one another, where people treat one another equitably, fairly, respectfully, and justly; where people are in loving, joyful and peaceful relationships with God. That is our hope.

We ask, "Why is God waiting?" Peter tells us God is waiting because God is patient. 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, God is patient with you, because God does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins." Peter is saying that the coming of the Day of the Lord is not necessarily sweetness and light. V. 10, "On that Day the heavens will disappear with a shrill noise, the heavenly bodies will burn up and be destroyed, and the earth with everything in it will vanish." The coming of the Day of the Lord is accompanied by major upheaval and destruction. The fulfillment of God's promises, the completion of God's will on this earth, whatever is necessary to do to bring about an earth in which righteousness (right relationships) will be at home, involves major revolutions and upheaval. Upheaval in your life, upheaval in society; and the greater the resistance, the greater the upheaval.

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Therefore, God patiently waits because God doesn't want anyone to be destroyed. God wants everyone to be saved. But, when its time has come, the Day of the Lord will come, and nothing will stop it. In our lesson today, Peter tells us to wait, but we are also told to hurry up. Waiting does not mean to be uninvolved, to let life happen, to be lethargic and complacent. Waiting means to make things happen. 3:11, 14, 15, "What kind of people should you be? Your lives should be holy and dedicated to God, as you wait for the Day of God, and do your best to make it come soon. And so, my friends, while you are waiting, do your best to live lives without spot or stain so that God will find you in peace. Look on our Lord's patience as the opportunity God is giving you to be saved."

We are called to wait for the Day of the Lord, and we are called to hurry it up. "Do your best to make it come soon," wrote Peter. Waiting does not mean slowing down the process. Waiting means hurrying up the process so the Day of the Lord will come. Over a century ago, the time had come to abolish slavery in this nation. Its day had come. But there were those who said, "Wait. Be patient. We're not ready yet. Slow down." And there was upheaval. There was destruction. Some of the wounds caused by that terrible Civil War have not yet been healed. Before the war, the major denominations of Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian split into northern and southern churches. The Methodists reunited in 1939, the Presbyterians just a few years ago, and the Baptists never will reunite!

Today we wait for nuclear arms control, but there is also a sense of urgency. There are those who say, "Wait. Slow down. Be sure you can completely trust the Russians." But to delay and obstruct the process of peacemaking invites a literal demonstration of Peter's prediction of upheaval and destruction, with the very earth dissolving. We are encouraged by the Gorbachev-Reagan conference. We have a long way to go, but the good will, humor, and friendship achieved were major accomplishments. Waiting does not mean slowing down the process. Waiting means hurrying up the process so the Day of the Lord will come. In Peter's words, "Do your best to make it come soon."

According to the United Methodist Reporter, on the cover of which you find our weekly New Outlook, a major issue facing the United Methodist Church when the General Conference convenes next year is homosexuality. The General Conference meets every four years to legislate, organize and focus our denomination. The time has come to address the oppression of homosexual persons. But there are those who say "Wait, slow down. Be patient. Polite society isn't ready yet." But there is a sense of urgency. We are already experiencing upheaval and destruction. There is a plague called AIDS. The church and society can no longer continue to force homosexuals, as we have for centuries, to live in ghettos and life styles that promote promiscuity and AIDS. The time has come to minister to homosexuals, welcome them into the church and into our communities, and encourage them and support them in relationships that are monogamous and mature. Waiting does not mean slowing down the process. Waiting means hurrying up the process so the Day of the Lord will come. "Do your best to make it come soon," urges Peter.

The time may have come in your own life to get your life going somewhere, to get it moving. You may have confused priorities. Parts of you may say, "Hey, wait, slow down." If you do, I suspect there will be tension, upheaval,

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and sickness, because you are trying to block the process. Waiting does not mean slowing down the process. Waiting means hurrying up the process so the Day of the Lord will come. "Do your best to make it come soon," urges Peter.

"Hurry up and wait" is the message of Advent. In the words of the Communion liturgy which will we use later in the service, "until Christ comes in final victory." Do your best to make it come soon.

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