

Lent 2C, Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalm 27

A theme of waiting runs through some of our readings this morning. Psalm 27 ends with the words “wait patiently for the Lord,” and in the Genesis reading, God told Abram that he will have children after Abram reminded God that Abram remained childless. He was an old man who had been waiting for this all this life. When Abram was seventy-five, God told him to leave everything he knew to go to a land that God would show him, and God promised to make of Abram a great nation. Abram and his wife and brother had adventures before the section we read today, but Abram was still waiting for children, for that great nation to begin.

Abram continued to wait after the covenant we read about today. They waited so long that he fathered a child with another woman. And when he was later told by three visitors that Sarah would bear him a child, they laughed.

Abram, later Abraham, waited and waited and waited. And he did end up the father of a great nation.

Does that mean that if we listen to Psalm 27 and wait patiently for the Lord, God will give us everything we want, like God eventually did for Abraham?

Even when we do get what we want, the story doesn’t end. Abraham had a son named Ishmael, whom he loved. Then Sarah bore Isaac, whose name meant laughter since she laughed when she heard she was going to have a son at her advanced age. But after Isaac was born, Abraham had to send his beloved son Ishmael away. And then he was asked to sacrifice Isaac. We know how that story ended—or at least we know how the story ended on top of the mountain: Abraham did not sacrifice his son. But how do you think their conversation went as they walked down the mountain? What do you think their relationship was like after that? Would Isaac ever feel the same about his father again after that? If you were Isaac, would you?

God is not going to give us everything we wanted, and even when we do get what we want, our life won’t become perfect. More obstacles arise. More needs. More desires.

God promised Abram that his descendants would be like the stars. Sarah having a baby was not the end of the story.

Florence Li Tim-Oi was the first woman in the Anglican Communion to become ordained a priest, in 1944, a full thirty years before eleven women were “irregularly” ordained here in the United States. She was ordained in a time when because of war the people she was serving could not receive sacraments. At first, her bishop authorized her as a deacon to consecrate Eucharist because of the extraordinary wartime circumstances. That might seem to be an end of waiting: waiting to be able to do this thing that women had been prohibited from doing, but Li actually described those first times of offering Eucharist during a war as “lonely.” After two years of that, she was ordained a priest. Was that the end of her waiting? No. Her ordination caused problems in the worldwide Anglican communion so she ended up resigning her priest license after the war, but she did not renounce her orders. Then churches in China were closed in 1958, and she came under suspicion because of her religious activities. She was then sent to re-education camp, and

was forced to cut up her vestments with scissors, and to seek work as a laborer, and for years waited to be able to freely pray again.

In the 1980s, she moved to Toronto, after women had been ordained in the U.S. and Canada, and for the final years of her life she was able to live as a priest.

Can you imagine her years and years and years of waiting? Of persecution? Once she finally had what she had waited for, do you think everything was all better? Or must it have been hard to emigrate to another country, another culture?

As a church, we have been waiting for the end of the pandemic for two years. Two years ago, our bishop closed churches in this diocese to in-person worship, and days later the whole country basically shut down. I remember how weird it was not to be able to buy lentils and toilet paper. Toilet paper I kind of understood, but lentils? It's not like they even taste good.

Months later we re-opened in a limited way, then were shut down again. Then we opened again, and then were almost shut down again but filed for an exemption. Each time we waited, sometimes impatiently, for the Lord. Waited to receive Eucharist again. Waited to hear all of the readings in worship. Waited for the livestream to kick in as we watched from home. Waited to sing. Waited to taste the real bread instead of wafers or bitsy little crackers. Waiting and waiting. Wait patiently for the Lord. For the bishop. For the CDC. For LEMs and acolytes and on and on and on. Right now we are still waiting for real bread and the common cup and unmasked singing. The diocese has now lifted its restrictions on the common cup, so on Palm Sunday we intend to go back to real bread, the common cup as one option for one, and unmasked singing with the windows open if current trends continue favorably.

But then will that be it? Will we then have everything we want?

Abram eventually got a son, but he did not live to see all of his descendants as numerous as the stars. His life was a small part of a bigger picture, and even when he got Ishmael and Isaac, his heart's desires, his life wasn't perfect.

Church will not be perfect once people are singing with masks off. We have lost some wonderful singers and other wonderful ministers in the past two years. The pandemic will leave our church forever changed, but it will eventually be behind us—and then other obstacles will arise. Things we haven't even thought of yet. We will always have new challenges, but also new blessings.

Last Wednesday, Dana Blackman told the story of Abram and Sarai and the promise of descendants more numerous than stars at our first in-person Wednesday evening Lenten program in two years. I was moved the entire evening: from readying this worship space for Taize-style worship to eating delicious soup made by Mac Todd and blessed by Courtney Mason to listening to Dana tell the story to an intergenerational discussion, which at my table included members from eight to seventysomething. I had worried a bit about what a truly intergenerational program would look like, but let me tell you, it took my breath away with its richness. And I think that was true for the kids as well: I loved look at Carter with his mouth wide open as Hector shared some stories from when he had been Carter's age.

In Lent, we wait for Easter. Easter may be the end of the story of Lent, but it's not end of the story of Christianity. The resurrection was the holiest day of Christianity, but now we Christians are called to continue the story, to follow in the way of Jesus, while we await his coming again.

What are you waiting for? When it happens, what will you wait for next?