

Worship Service

BY ELIZABETH SANDS WISE

Prelude

Silent Meditation

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

Call to Worship

This is our inheritance:

It is hard to be attentive.

It is hard to be patient.

It is hard to wait.

We are Noah, waiting for rain, waiting for the rain to stop,
waiting for the waters to recede, always waiting.

We are the Israelites, waiting and wandering in the desert.

We are Elijah, waiting for God's voice, expecting it in the wrong places.

We are the Psalmist, beckoning our hearts to be still before the Lord.

We are the prodigal son, disbelieving our Father waits patiently
for us to turn.

We are the disciples, waiting fearfully in the upper room.

We are believers waiting expectantly, impatiently,
and sometimes obliviously, for Christ's return.

But we are here, and we are waiting.

Let us awaken our hearts to worship attentively
as we wait for God's voice.

Hymn

“Awake, Awake to Love and Work”

Awake, awake to love and work!
The lark is in the sky;
the fields are wet with diamond dew;
the worlds awake to cry
their blessings on the Lord of life,
as he goes meekly by.

Come, let our voice be one with theirs,
shout with their shout of praise;
see how the giant sun soars up,
great lord of years and days!
So let the love of Jesus come
and set our souls ablaze.

To give and give, and give again,
what God has given free;
to spend ourselves nor count the cost;
to serve right gloriously
the God who gave all worlds that are,
and all that are to be.

Geoffrey A. Studdert-Kennedy (1921), alt.
Tune: MORNING SONG (Dare)

Children's Sermon

Why Is Waiting Hard?

Ask the children to think about times that they had to wait for something. How did it go? Were they able to wait?

Continue the conversation: Why do we say “I can't wait!” when something is exciting, like a birthday, a vacation, or Christmas morning? Why is waiting a hard thing to do?

Read the first part of Psalm 37:7 (“Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him”), and ask the children what they think it means to wait on God.

Conclude with a brief prayer asking God to teach us how to wait patiently.

Guided Prayers of Confession

We hear the children talk about why waiting is hard, and we realize that waiting is hard for us, too. We are impatient.

We are unwilling – or too often, simply unable – to see the rewards for waiting. We see the dividends of activity. We say, “Our time is money.” We pride ourselves on being too busy. We find our worth in activity, full calendars, and back-to-back meetings.

We hear the words of the Psalmist:

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him.

But we do not wait. Sometimes it is too hard.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him.

Sometimes it is too boring.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him.

Sometimes, we tell ourselves, we simply do not have enough time.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him.

Be still before the Lord. *Wait patiently* for him.

Be still.

Wait patiently.

We enter into a time of silence and personal examination to consider our schedules, our attitude toward our busy days, our to-do lists. How has your life become weighed down with distraction? In what ways has your busyness pulled you away from the attentive patience necessary for hearing God’s voice? Confess to God your impatience with waiting. Confess those distractions that make it difficult for you to be still before God.

Hear now these words of assurance:

Because the God of Scripture is revealed to us as one slow to anger and full of compassion, we can trust that God forgives all who humbly repent and turn to Jesus. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Community Prayer

Some days, we are so distracted and busy
that we find waiting on God to be impossible.

On other days, we feel like all we do is wait.

We wait for our children to grow up. We wait for a promotion or a new job. We wait for Christmas. We wait for retirement. We wait.
We wait.

Impatiently, we wait.

We forget that the waiting is a season that shapes us.

And we forget that God waits on us, too.

Like the father of the Prodigal Son, waiting and watching for his son to return home,

God waits for us to turn, to return,

to believe in the peace that comes with restoration.

Like the sower of seeds from Christ's parables,

God waits for us to take root, to bear fruit, to nourish others.

God, who came in the fullness of time,

who knows the timelessness beyond time, waits,

and we, in the image of God, must wait, too.

As a community seeking the kingdom of God

within our homes, with one another,

in the marketplace, the neighborhood, and the world,

may we learn how to wait,

how to be patient with stillness,

how to keep God's eternity just under the surface,

knowing God waits for us

and knowing God waits with us.

Amen.

Silent Meditation

You are the one who made us

You silver all the minnows in all rivers

You wait in the deep woods

*Anne Porter*¹

Hymn of Assurance

"So I Can Wait"

I know that heav'n lies just beyond

this earthly state, this earthly state;

that Christ himself holds death's cold wand;

so I can wait, so I can wait.

I know the dark mysterious ways

my feet may tread, my feet may tread

will all be plain when heav'nly rays

are on them shed, are on them shed.

I know the heartaches of this life
will all be healed, will all be healed,
when the blest peace that ends earth's strife
shall be revealed, shall be revealed.
I know that 'mid the world's turmoil
God giveth rest, God giveth rest;
his arm is round me in its toil;
and I am blest, and I am blest.

I know that when my time shall come
to dwell above, to dwell above,
Jesus his child will welcome home
with tenderest love, with tenderest love.
His angel guards will open wide
heav'n's pearly gate, heav'n's pearly gate;
and I shall then be satisfied,
so I can wait, so I can wait!

Julia C. Thompson (1878)

Suggested Tunes: COVA DA IRIA or SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER

A Story of Waiting

Every congregation is made up of members who have had seasons of waiting. Some members may have experienced short- or long-term joblessness while waiting for the next step in a career. Some members have waited for weeks, months, or even years for adoptions to take place, for healing to take place, for miracles to take place.

Prior to the service, ask someone to share a story of waiting. For this particular story, select someone whose waiting has come to an end, whether or not that season of waiting is now looked back on with an awareness of the fruit that came with the waiting. (It is often helpful, especially with stories that may be personal, to encourage the storyteller to write the story out in full and read it verbatim.)

Unison Response: 2 Peter 3:8-9

**But do not ignore this one fact, beloved,
that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day.
The Lord is not slow about his promise,
as some think of slowness,
but is patient with you.**

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina, literally “sacred reading,” is an early Christian practice of praying Scripture. The same passage is read aloud three or more times, with a lengthy pause between each reading. During the first reading, simply listen to the words as if you have never heard this passage before. During the second reading, place yourself in the passage and imagine what the moment felt like visually, physically, aurally. During the third reading, listen for a word from God for you today. How might God be speaking to you through this scripture passage?

At that place [the prophet Elijah] came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying...“Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him....

1 Kings 19:9, 11-13

Hymn of Response

“To Know That You Are God”

In this world of rushing noise, can we hear God’s voice?
Violent winds of weary haste, gales of greed and waste,
hurricanes of doubt and fear drown out what we would hear.
Still our troubled, anxious thoughts, to know that you are God.

Lord, you’re not in burning greed; show us what we need.
Filled with far too worldly cares; teach us we are heirs.
Blinded by slick marketing, but made to serve the King:
stir our hunger for your love, to seek you as our God.

Nations quake and churches fall; no one hears your call.
All we trust in for release fails to give us peace.
Shake our prideful hearts again, destroy our homes on sand;
keep us grounded on the rock of trusting you, O God.

Lord of thunder, storms, and seas, shout through such as these;
or, as is your gracious choice, speak in softer voice.
Help us learn with grace to see you in the least of these;
mend our hearts through work and prayer, that we may love you here.

Jonathan Sands Wise (2016)

Tune: ADORO TE DEVOTE (arr. Kurt Kaiser)

(pp. 55-57 of this volume)

A Second Story of Waiting

Ask a second member of the congregation to share. For this particular story, consider selecting someone who is in the midst of a waiting season. Encourage the storyteller to be honest and transparent regarding the difficulties and the rewards of waiting. It is often difficult to find hope during seasons of waiting.

Unison Response: 2 Peter 3:8-9

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that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day.
The Lord is not slow about his promise,
as some think of slowness,
but is patient with you.**

Hymn of Response

“From Out the Depths, I Cry, O Lord, to You”

From out the depths I cry, O Lord, to you,
Lord, hear my call.

I love you, Lord, for you have heard my plea,
forgiving all.

If you did mark our sins, then who would stand?
But grace and mercy dwell at your right hand.

I wait for God, the Lord, and on his Word
my hope relies;
my soul still waits and looks unto the Lord
till light arise.

I look for him to drive away my night,
yes, more than watchmen look for morning light.

Hope in the Lord, you waiting saints, and he
will well provide;
for mercy and redemption full and free
with him abide.
From sin and evil, mighty though they seem,
his arm almighty will his saints redeem.

The Psalter (1912), #362, alt.
Tune: SANDON

Sermon

Communion Meditation

When winter is over
And all your unimaginable promises
Burst into song on death's bare branches.

*Anne Porter*²

Hymn of Benediction

"Light after Darkness"

Light after darkness, gain after loss,
strength after weakness, crown after cross;
sweet after bitter, hope after fears,
home after wandering, praise after tears.

Sheaves after sowing, sun after rain,
sight after mystery, peace after pain;
joy after sorrow, calm after blast,
rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.

Near after distant, gleam after gloom,
love after loneliness, life after tomb;
after long agony, rapture of bliss,
right was the pathway, leading to this.

Frances R. Havergal (1879)
Suggested Tunes: LIGHT AFTER DARKNESS (Sankey) or ADELAIDE

Benediction and Sending

Go and be still.

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently.

When you find yourself at the mouth of a cave,
and all you hear is silence, lean in.

Listen, friends, for the voice of God.

For with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day.

The Lord is not slow about his promise,
as some think of slowness,
but is patient with you.

Go and be still.

NOTES

1 These are the opening lines from Anne Porter, "The Birds of Passage," in *Living Things: Collected Poems* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2006), 156-157.

2 These are the concluding, eschatological lines from Anne Porter, "A Short Testament," in *Living Things*, 94.



E L I Z A B E T H S A N D S W I S E

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