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Psalm 25:1-10

It can be excruciating to wait. We may long for something great to happen now. Or we may dread a coming experience that we'd rather not happen at all. If we're paying attention, we may end up with some good stories about waiting. Goofy tales while we're at the grocery store registers. Impatient stories from ridiculous traffic delays. Poignant moments waiting with loved ones in hospital rooms.

When we first arrived in Pittsburgh almost a year and a half ago, I read Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*. The play focuses on two guys who are sitting and waiting for someone. Yes, that is the entire play. I had no idea how fitting that choice would be! Before we moved here from Minnesota, I had already been waiting to begin the call process. After we were here, I waited for the Holy Spirit to discern the right congregation, and she moved slowly. In November (one year ago), we learned the exciting news of my pregnancy. With all the uncertainties combined, it was almost impossible for us to make plans. Some times I was excited about the possibility of it all. Some times I was angry at having to wait. Often I tried to distract myself with the things of daily life, to make time go more quickly.

All of this morning's scripture lessons coach us on how to be in Advent. How do we prepare our souls for Christ, during our four weeks of waiting? In *Jeremiah*

(33:14-16), God tells Israel and Judah that the Lord will be faithful to the promises made to them. In *First Thessalonians* (3:9-13), Paul writes about what he, Silvanus and Timothy do as they wait to see the congregation in Thessalonica. And he encourages them for what they should do while they wait for the apostles' arrival. In the gospel of *Luke* (21:25-36), Jesus tells his followers how they should wait, and what they should look for.

Our scripture all speaks of waiting. The most instructive of them all is our psalm. It is a prayer-song that teaches our souls about what it means to wait in more general terms.

Many psalms have a clear scriptural context to them. Some are obviously written from David's perspective. Others focus on different stories in Israel's salvation history. But *Psalms 25* teaches the singer or pray-er about the life of faith. In the original Hebrew, it is an acrostic. Do you also remember doing these when you were younger? I would write the letters of my name down a page, and then come up with words that started with each letter. Jennifer then was: J for joyful, E for enthusiastic, N for nice. you've got the idea. In the original Hebrew text, each line of *Psalms 25* begins with a different Hebrew letter. The first line starts with the first letter of the alphabet—and the last line starts with the last letter. It skips a couple

along the way. But the author is making a point. *Psalm 25* covers all the important things of life, topics from A to Z. It is a model prayer. Like the Lord's prayer, it is a prayer that we can and should emulate.

What our psalm teaches is what it means for us to wait with God.

Waiting sounds like such a passive thing. But the Psalmist's waiting is very active. It's similar to how our family waited for Thanksgiving. It started with a relationship—we invited friends to visit. We talked with them and planned our time together. Imagined our dinner menu. Went grocery shopping. Ordered desserts. Cleaned the house. Prepared food in advance. Welcomed our friends when they arrived.

Psalm 25 also starts with a relationship. "To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul." (*Ps 25:1*) From the very beginning, we turn to God. When we "lift up" our souls—or "lift up your hearts" in our communion liturgy. It calls to mind a traditional Hebrew prayer stance—with hands raised. When we lift up our souls, we are offering ourselves in prayer to God. We are changing where our souls sit (or stand), so that we can draw closer to God.

This drawing close to God is the first step in our waiting. What follows is also centered on our relationship—not like our busy preparations before guests arrive. It's

not about making things perfect before God comes. Instead, as we wait, we tend to our relationship with God. We turn to God that we might receive while we wait.

The psalmist prays that God will:

- “~~make~~ me to know your ways. teach me your paths.” *(Ps 25:4)* We hope to receive God’s instruction, that we might know God’s ways or paths of life.
- “~~lead~~ me in your truth, and teach me.” *(Ps 25:5)* We hope to receive God’s teachings, that we might know truth and wisdom.
- “~~not~~ remember the sins of my youth.” *(Ps 25:7)* We hope to receive forgiveness for our wrongs—to be restored to a right relationship in God’s steadfast love.

Waiting with God means remembering who God is. Remembering his teachings and forgiveness. Remembering the ways of people of faith. Remembering the promises that God has made, and his faithfulness to those promises. The psalmist writes:

‘Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.
All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.’ *(Ps 25:8-10)*

In our anticipation, we recall God’s character and love for us.

But waiting with God also means remembering who we are. It is returning to our identity as God’s people. When we follow the psalmist’s instructions, we fulfill

the promises that were made for us and by us at the baptismal font. We have promised:

- To live among God's faithful people.
- To hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper.
- To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.
- To serve all people, following the example of Jesus.
- And to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. (*ELW*, 236)

We grow in all these ways when we follow the psalmist's guide. When we seek God's forgiveness, teaching, and ways, we again learn to live as God's people together.

Advent is a time of waiting on God's promises. We wait to celebrate the gift of the Christ child. And we wait for the day that Christ will come again. Our psalmist teaches us today that: waiting for God's promises involves returning to our own promises. To remember who we are in God's eyes. To remember the one whom we worship and follow. This is a busy time of year for all of us, filled with celebrations and preparations. I have found myself telling friends that it will be great to see them in late January. Our Advent waiting is a call to be re-immersed in our relationship with God. To remember God's goodness. And to learn from God, once again. It's not about finding time to do one more thing. It's shifting our focus, so that our busy days are centered on God in a special way.

Pray with me the first verse of our psalm once again: To you, O Lord, I lift up
my soul. (*Ps 25:1*)

May God bless us as we wait.