

"Soon Come. Come Soon"

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; Luke 24:44-53

Ascension Sunday, June 1, 2025

Woodbury United Methodist Church, Woodbury, Connecticut

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor

My wife Carol tells a story from when she visited the Caribbean island of Montserrat. It is the British crown colony that her people hail from, and she was there some 15 years ago when her sons were boys.

They were at her Aunt Ann's house and a family friend came by. He noticed there were some plants in pots and asked *"Do you need these planted?"* When told "yes," he grabbed a shovel and started digging.

About that time his cell phone rang. The conversation on speaker was with another family member who asked whether he was on the way and would be on time for an event. He said, "Uh-huh, uh-huh, soon come, soon come." He hung up the phone and resumed his digging!

"Soon come" Jesus promises to the disciples in today's Gospel about God's Holy Spirit. As the 40 days of Jesus' earthly presence after the resurrection comes to a close, he commissions his disciples to carry on the work. It's a monumental task. It sobers us today to think we are heirs to the same task. Proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations? Be witnesses to this and to his victory over death? And then he says *"Stay here until you are clothed with power from on high."* In other words, "wait."

"Wait." W-A-I-T. Is there any more annoying word to 21st century Americans? You can almost hear the mechanical voice as you punch the button to cross Main Street South by St. Paul's Church and Route 317. "WAIT." Beep-beep-beep-beep. Good luck if you're in a hurry.

Wait. It touches the inner child in some of us, a reminder of the things we wanted to do or have; and the parent or parental figure in our life who said "wait." Maybe not in those words. How about "maybe" or "we'll see." And we knew it meant "not on your life."

Some of us are not so good at waiting. Is impatience a sin? If by sin we mean "missing the mark God intends for us" then the answer is "probably." I can tell you that if I'd waited two days, the ice on my driveway would have melted. Instead, my impatience to chip the ice and have the cleanest driveway in my neighborhood led to the slip and fall that

gave me a broken elbow, surgery and months of occupational therapy that is yet to be completed. I should have said to my driveway “Soon come” and gone back to the couch. This I’ll tell you: patience is one fruit of the Holy Spirit, according to the scriptures (Galatians 5:22-23). So our impatience blocks the Spirit, and the fruit dies on the vine.

Audience participation time: how many of you have used the “door close” button on an elevator in the U.S.? Okay, how much time did it save you? Modern elevators take 8 seconds to fully close: 5 seconds from open to fully closed, and remaining open 3 seconds from the time of the last person’s entry. The “door close” button overrides the 3-second rule and causes the door to close immediately. So the “door close” button saves you 3 seconds.

We justify this and other imagined urgencies by all sorts of mantras: “Every second counts.” “Time is money.” “Ya snooze, ya lose.” Don’t get me wrong. If you’re racing 100 meters or racing to the hospital, the urgencies are real and every second does count. Some of you know this first-hand. More often, though, our inability to wait is a desire to control outcomes and a subtle (or not so subtle) reliance on “self” to the exclusion of faith in the power of a liberating, resurrecting, transforming God.

“Soon” is, of course, a relative term. “*Are we there yet?*” asks the child from the car seat. “*We’ll be there soon*” comes the answer, which is never soon enough. Especially if the journey is not in a child’s car seat but in a grown-up life with grown-up trials and stresses, and when the “soon” involves prayer petitions for our loved ones and ourselves. “Soon come” may then feel as it might as well be “never.”

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God says “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways...As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts your thoughts.*” We sometimes extend this to God’s timing as well. From the Psalms to Job, we sometimes lament when God’s time is not in accordance with our time. Next week our Youth Education Sunday is based on the theme, “*In God’s Good Time,*” and we will hear from our young people about how they experience God’s presence in these times of their lives.

That highlights a certain generational distinction, I believe, in how some of us experience God's timeliness. In the movie *"The Polar Express,"* the conductor is agitated because he fears they will not reach the North Pole by midnight Christmas Eve, saying "It's five minutes to midnight." But the obnoxious know-it-all kid says *"It's been five 'til for the past hour. We've got nothing but time, we've got plenty of time – we've got time to kill."* For some younger folks, their life spreading before them, time seems abundant, and likely it is. And we rejoice with them for all that may, and will, be in their lives.

Yet others hear the clock of life ticking. The alligator in the movie "Peter Pan" got a taste of Captain Hook – that's why he has a hook instead of a hand – and somewhere along the way the alligator accidentally swallowed a crew member's clock. As the alligator pursues Captain Hook for another bite of that tasty arm, the alligator emits a constant "tick-tock" sound that warns the captain that his days may be numbered. Some of us of a certain age hear that clock more loudly these days, and are urged on to work, to travel, to live life as fully as we can because we may not know what the next day will bring.

This discrepancy between God's time and our time sometimes seeps into our prayer life, no matter our age. Particularly when our prayers are petitions for God's intervention in times of trouble, and are not answered speedily or in the way we hope, we feel God is slow to act.

The story is told of a person who felt God's silence in answer to prayer, and cried out, *"God, answer me."* To their surprise came the voice *"I am here."* The person lamented *"God, I've been praying for what seems like an eternity. Yet you do not answer."* God replied, *"My time is not your time. To me, a minute is like a million years to you."* This was not comforting but gave the petitioner an idea. They said, *"Then, O God, what is a million dollars like to you?"* God replied, *"A million dollars is like a penny."* So the person asked *"God, can I have a penny?"* and God replied *"Just a minute."*

It must have felt God was delayed for St. John the Divine, the author of Revelation. We've heard readings from Revelation for several weeks now. We know John was locked up tight on the island of Patmos for being unwilling to call the Roman Emperor Domitian "Lord and God." He would

not bow to temporal authority and the result was imprisonment, a small mercy since others who took this stand were killed for their courage. We know much of Revelation is written in code and we've lost the code. We know that Revelation was written to a persecuted church, and that it is a message of hope, an aspirational message of a new heaven and a new earth; a vision of the holy city and an ingathering of peoples that culminates in the verses at the end of the book we heard today:

"See, I am coming soon: my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work....It is I, Jesus....the Spirit and the bride say 'Come.' [By the way, "the bride" is "the church."] And let everyone who hears say 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come....Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

It comes as no surprise to say that the times in which we live are also unsettled. And if Jesus is going to repay according to everyone's work, we'd better get to it. Look, it's easy to despair, to throw up our hands in the face of natural disasters and war and political maneuvering and say, *"What can one person do?"* The answer, in fact, is much. Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something. You'll hear from Mark Davis shortly about how the many efforts of many "one persons" have made a difference in the lives of our parishioners and our neighbors.

Many of you know that I am here, in retirement, because it was something I felt God called me to do. And Carol, who is undoubtedly more lovable than me, was 100% on board. What is the "something" God is calling you to do?

Stuart Townend's lyrics moved many of us on Easter Sunday in the song *"In Christ Alone"* that Sarah Kate Walkup sang so poignantly:

*"No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home, Here in the power of Christ I'll stand."*

Or as Isaac Watts wrote three centuries ago:

*"A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone
Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.*

*O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come;
be thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home."*

"O God, Our Help in Ages Past," UMH #117, verses 4 and 6

So let's get on it. *"Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem."* It's our time for a renewed commitment to Jesus' call to ministry. Oh, and one more thing: notice what happens at the end of the Gospel story: after Jesus blessed the disciples and withdrew from them, they followed his directions! They *"returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple praising God."* The end of this mandate to serve, to wait with patience for Christ's coming; for the bestowing of the gift of the Holy Spirit that empowers our work in ministry; and for his response in our time of need: the end is not dread or fear, but joy. So let's get to it. Time's a-wastin'. Soon come. Come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.