Pastor’s Musings Week 3 in Advent – December 14 2020

We live in the already/not yet on God’s calendar. During his earthly ministry, Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God is near. Jesus broke into our reality as a baby born in Bethlehem – Immanuel – God with us. With his crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled God’s good plan to provide salvation for every human being who would trust in Jesus and his sacrifice. When we believe and trust in Jesus and repent of our sins, we are *already* citizens of the Kingdom. Jesus’ resurrection fills us with hope and assurance that God will complete his work of restoring the world to God’s original design and purpose.

But in Advent, we also recognize that there is more still to occur in God’s wonderful plan for humanity. We live in anticipation of the return of Christ when the fullness of God’s kingdom will be realized, when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, when there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, and when all things will be new. This reality is *not yet*, but we live in sure and certain hope that Jesus will return, and God’s kingdom will be established in all of its completeness.

This calendar year has been harder than most in my lifetime to live in the tension of the already/not yet. Daily, we see evidence of the inbreaking of God’s kingdom, but we also see, at times, significantly more evidence of how God’s kingdom is not yet here in its fulness. Living in this in-between time is hard, trying, and downright discouraging at times. We identify with the Apostle Paul who recognizes that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time and who himself joins that groaning while looking ahead to the restoration of all things (Romans 8:22-23).

With some of Peter’s contemporaries, we wonder why God is being slow about the fulfillment of his promise, but with Peter we have confidence that God is being patient in this not yet time because of God’s desire to have everyone turn toward him, repent of their sins, and receive the salvation he offers (2 Peter 3:9).

Over our lifetimes, we all experience those in-between times in life. One of those times that have occurred in my life happened when I was a church musician. Three times, the ministry that I was involved in was ended due to forces outside of my control. The first time this happened was when we were living in Farmington Hills, MI. I and my family spent a years’ time waiting to know where God would have us go. Throughout this time though, we were blessed by the love and generosity of many people. God had a plan in place for us and even though it seemed like a long time to wait, when the answer came there was a real feeling of completion of the in-between as we prepared to move to the next place that God was calling us.

God has taught me much in the in-between times. God has shown me that I am to wait actively. I am to be about God’s business in the waiting. I am to be earnest in prayer, diligent in deploying the gifts God has poured out on me, faithful to the vision God has imparted, and prepared for the ultimate realization of God’s plans. I am to realize that I am not in control. God is. I am to joyfully surrender to God’s timing, rejoicing at every evidence of moving from the already to the fulfillment of the not yet.

Regardless of your position on what must happen in The United Methodist Church in the coming months, we are in an in-between time. Uncertainty looms large. We wonder if there will be a General Conference in 2021. We wonder how the decisions of that General Conference will impact us individually and the local churches we attend or lead. We wonder when we will be released to move ahead with the vision God has given us for a renewed, restored, revitalized Methodist church that will be fully global and bearing much fruit.

Yet God is very much present with us. God is not slow to fulfill His plans and purposes. God is redeeming the time even as we may be frustrated with events. God calls us to be faithful in our circumstances, bearing fruit where He has planted us, preparing for what is ahead, and full of faith in His goodness to accomplish His purposes in and through us.

My prayer, and I am sure yours as well, is that we will never again experience a year like 2020. We have witnessed terrible suffering, social and economic turmoil, and the deaths of millions of people. We are reminded once again how broken the world truly is. And yet, with the Apostle Paul, we find ways to rejoice even in the midst of suffering, waiting, and expectation. In the difficult days of this Advent season, may God find us active in our waiting, fervent in our prayers, diligent in attending to what He has entrusted to us, and resolute in our faith in Him.

Thanks to Keith Boyette for the majority of this reflection. It has been used with his permission and blessing. *Keith Boyette is president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association and an elder in the Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church.*