

Hebrews 10:19-25 The Approaching Day

Abilene, Kansas. That seems far away. I was driving to Colorado on vacation last month. I had left Columbia, MO heading west on I-70 and had driven through Kansas City and made some headway across the state when I saw sign that I was coming up on Abilene, not to be confused with the much larger city of the same name that is in Texas.

This Abilene is the hometown of Dwight David Eisenhower, who was, of course, the commander of the allied forces in Europe in WW2 and later President of the United States. His Presidential library is there and on my way back I stopped and visited for a few hours which I recommend if you are headed out that way and have a few hours to kill.

On this particular day I was trying to make some time so I kept on going, hoping that I was getting near to the CO state line and thinking, Abilene just sounds like it is a long way out there, only to discover that this little town is actually in the eastern half of Kansas and I still had a long way to go. The journey took a couple hours longer than I had planned. I had some waiting to do.

Hannah

In the OT readings for today, which we did not read, but I can tell you about them, the story of Hannah is told. It is found in the first couple of chapters of 1

Samuel, Hannah is the mother of the prophet/judge the book is named after.

Like other prominent women in the bible (Elizabeth, Sarah) She had no children, and even though her husband loved her very dearly, she felt disgraced. His name was Elkanah, and he had two wives. The other's name was Penninah, and she had many sons and daughters. In the story she provokes Hannah about her lack of children, to the point where Hannah wept and would not eat.

At last, Hannah went to the temple to pray and plead to be able to have a child. The priest, whose name was Eli, thought she was intoxicated though she was actually very upset about the whole situation. She made a promise to God that she would dedicate her son to the Lord's service were she blessed with one.

"In the course of time she conceived and gave birth to a son whom she called, 'Samuel,' because she said, 'I asked the Lord for him.'" Anyway, her waiting causes my waiting to pale by comparison, she waited years for a child that it seemed would never come, while I only had to survive a couple of extra hours.

The Day

Waiting is a very important part of the spiritual life as it is presented in the Bible. There is a powerful sense for what we nowadays call, "delayed gratification." One of

the maladies that affects almost all of the world's less successful people is the lack of patience, the inability to wait, to "delay gratification."

It takes years to grow up and go to college or graduate school or learn a trade, to work one's way up the ladder of success, to pay off a mortgage. It takes decades to become an adult, some people never make it. It seems like we are always waiting for something; graduation, marriage, children, first for them to come and then for them to grow up; all our waiting is a life lesson. We await God.

The theological word for this waiting is, "eschatology," the doctrine last things; and it rises out of the biblical conviction that our days are numbered, there will be a reckoning. Christ will return and there will be a last judgment and the consummation of the age.

In every generation there are among Christian believers those who are convinced that the end is near, the return of Christ is immanent. It has been 2,000 years since Jesus and we are still waiting, talk about delayed gratification.

There are end times specialists outside the religious realm, like those who always think WW3 is on the horizon. In the Gospel reading for today, which we also did not read, but I can tell you about it, Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of wars, but that is not the end." It seems that humanity has taken war to the

nth degree, just to prove how hesitant the end is to come. Perhaps they are over-stating the case but they're certainly among the modern forecasters of doom.

And yet it is not doom that we await, but heaven itself, and not just in the sense of beauty and peace and paradise, but justice and truth tempered by mercy and love. In the OT they came to call it, "The Day of the Lord. And they waited for it.

Assurance

The gospel belief about the end is that it *is* coming, to be sure, but no one knows when. There are other things like that, sure to come but no one knows when; hurricanes and tornadoes, wildfires and floods, seem to come like the wind, whenever they get around to it.

Romance comes on its own and some of the other things we await are wonderful like that, but just as elusive and unpredictable. The question isn't so much about the fact of the Day of the Lord, but the what of how we are to live our lives while we wait.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews is primarily concerned that we as believers not be full of anxiety about it. He uses the illustration of the temple sacrifices to help us out, and the Day of Atonement, on which the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies,

the most sacred place, where God dwells, and offer sacrifices for himself and the people.

He tells us that Jesus is the great high priest who did not require sacrifices for himself and offered instead himself as a once-and-for-all-time sacrifice for our redemption. In part, this letter explains the Christian abandonment of temple worship on the grounds that in view of Christ's sacrifice it is no longer necessary.

In part, this letter explains that as we wait we can have confidence that our redemption is secure.

There is no need for anxiety about either Christ's return or our own passing lives, whichever happens first, or about our sinfulness, which has been eradicated, or about the meaningfulness of our lives while we wait. The word we use for this confidence is Assurance, and it is a doctrine of the faith.

Perseverance in Service

And so our text tells us in general terms, how to live;

1 - We are invited into the Holy of Holies, where God dwells, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in the full assurance of faith."

2 - We are called to be hopeful, and that means hopeful about our eternal destiny, about our individual lives, and about the life of the world. We see negative things; division, hatred and discord, death and

destruction, injustice and disappointments of all kinds, but we *do not lose hope*.

3 - And thus we are called towards love and goodness, "Consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds."

4 - And to community. People, even the introverted recluses among us, thrive in the context of relationships. That is what the church is, people in community, believing their way together towards salvation. "Let us not give up the habit, as many have, of meeting together." Encouraging one another along the way.

And that is what our prayer focus is really about, along with our missions offerings and our commitment to local ministries like Family Promise and PIN and Common Ground Free Store and Andrews House and others. It is all faith awaiting the Approaching Day.

I made it to Boulder and had a good visit with my son; and Hannah's son grew up to be one of Israel's great prophets, anointing David as their king; the Israelites made it into the land of the promise and WW2 ended at long last and it wasn't the end we await, but it will come and in the meantime we are confident in the assurance of the faith we share,

To the praise of God's glorious grace.

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