

Sermon / 5 December 2021 / Luke 3:1-6 / Killing Time/ Rev. David Martin, Deacon / St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

At the beginning of his letter to the Philippians (which Alex read this morning), Paul wrote: "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

"The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

That sounds great. So, what do we do while waiting for that good work to be completed?

Last week, Fr. Christopher gave a sermon in which he spoke about waiting. Advent is the season of waiting.... waiting for the coming of Jesus.... of God.

What do we do while we're waiting?

Are we productive? Or rather are we impatient? Are we wasteful?

Fr. Christopher reminded us that we often feel waiting is a waste of time. We have a particular distaste for waiting because we always need to be busy.

So, what do we do while we're waiting?

I think we all know the answer to that, don't we?

We fidget. We complain. We wish we were already doing or experiencing whatever it is we are waiting for. And we probably pull out our intelligence draining phone and stare – blankly – at it for hours.

Fr. Christopher was correct. We are really bad at waiting.

I don't hear it much these days, but there is a phrase for waiting and having no real purpose while you wait. We call it "killing time."

Killing time.

As if we wanted for the time while we were waiting to be gone – to not count - to be dead.

May I suggest that instead of avoiding the wait - instead of killing time - we do what Fr. Christopher suggested in last week's sermon. He said that while we wait, perhaps **we could be making ourselves something beautiful for God.**

Let us consider that while we are waiting, we can use the time to make something beautiful for God – and maybe that is the good work God has begun among us.

Instead of killing time during this Advent season - while we wait on the coming of Jesus - let's put that time of waiting to use.

Don't waste it. Don't kill it. Use it to make something beautiful for God.

But how?

In this morning's Gospel lesson from Luke, we are introduced to John the Baptist - Johnny B as some of us here at St. Mark's lovingly call him. We don't learn many personal details about him this morning - other than the word of God came to John and that he went around the wilderness and the area proclaiming the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He quoted the prophets Isaiah and Baruch and told everyone - told us - to prepare the way of the Lord.

John the Baptist told everyone to make the paths straight for the coming of God. He said to fill the valleys and to level off the mountains and the hills. He told us to straighten out the crooked paths and to smooth over the rough places.

Don't kill time while you're waiting for the coming of the Messiah, John told us. There is a lot of work to do. Level. Smooth. Fill. Straighten. Make something beautiful for God.

There are many interpretations of this passage from Isaiah quoted by John. But I'd like for us to look at it like this. God is coming....and God is coming for all of us.... for everyone. We need to make sure everyone has the opportunity to experience the love of Christ.

There are to be no special places accessible to only a few people.

And there shouldn't be any place for someone to hide or to be left behind.

Get rid of the lofty places where someone thinks there are better than everyone else.

Remove the low places where people feel they have no hope.

Smooth out the rough paths where someone might stumble or have difficulty traveling.

Make a straight path so everyone can get to the destination without getting lost.

Don't kill time while we're waiting, says John. Get busy and make sure everyone is on equal footing.

And that is where we get some comfort and encouragement from our buddy, Paul, this morning. Our second lesson is the very beginning of his letter to a brand-new church in Philippi. He's offering them encouragement while he's in prison in Rome.

Paul writes this to his friends: "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

“The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

You see, my friends, this work we have to do while we are waiting – this creating something beautiful for God - has already been started. Paul knows this.

In the first century, the Philippians started a brand-new church with a brand-new religion. They had no idea what the future held. They expected Jesus to return just about any day. Paul told them that the good work which God had begun in them – building the church and telling the world about God’s redeeming love – this good work would be brought to completion by the time Jesus came again.

We are listening to the same encouragement 20 centuries later. The good work God began in us will be brought to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

We are waiting. And we have work to do – with God’s help, we are called to complete the good work God began in us when Christianity started.

There is no time to kill. The good work is to make sure that every single human being – that every creature God created – has an equal opportunity to experience the love and cosmic generosity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We can’t be standing by – idly waiting for Jesus to show up. We must assure that everyone – every single person – has the ability to **know** and **love** and **meet** Jesus. Jesus is not MY personal Savior. Jesus is not YOUR personal savior. Jesus is the savior of us all. And we must spend this time while we are waiting to assure that can happen.

We’ve got mountains to tumble. We’ve got hills to bulldoze. We’ve got valleys to fill in and low places raise up. We’ve got crooked paths to straighten out.

We’ve got immigrants and refugees to assist in finding safe homes in new countries.

We’ve got health care to get to all people equally.

We’ve got people who have no where to live to help find homes.

We’ve got people who are cold who need to get warm.

We’ve got children who need safe families to love them.

We’ve got addicts to help get clean and sober.

We’ve got hungry people to feed.

We’ve got a planet that needs saving from our own destruction.

We’ve got racism to eradicate.

We don't have time to kill. God has begun a good work in us – and it is up to us to follow God's call.... God's commandment and bring those good works to completion.

Isaiah first foretold it: Prepare the way of the Lord.

Johnny B reminded us: Prepare the way of the Lord – make sure everyone has a chance.

Paul encouraged us: Prepare the way of the Lord – by completing that good work God has started in us.

Stop wasting time. There is no time to kill.

We are called to make something beautiful for God.

Let's prepare. Let's work.

And let's pray the one who started a good work in us will **help us** bring it to completion by the time of Jesus Christ.