

What are We Waiting For?

By
The Reverend Rebecca Kirkpatrick
From the Pulpit of
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

August 10, 2025

Psalm 13

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? ³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, ⁴ and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. ⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Luke 12:32-40

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return

from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks.³⁷ Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.³⁸ If he comes during the middle of the night or near dawn and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.³⁹ “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into.⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Many of you may already know at least a little about the ecumenical monastic community of Taizé in rural France. It was founded in 1940 by a Swiss pastor named Brother Roger as a place of reconciliation and peace, a place of safety, amid the turmoil and anxiety of World War II. Today, it welcomes thousands of young people from around the world each year for prayer, reflection, and communal living centered on simplicity, silence, and song.

I spent two weeks at Taizé when I was a seminarian, and availed myself of a workshop offered to train folks on recreating the unique and meditative style of worship in one’s own local congregation. Two key elements in a Taizé service make them radically different from most other styles of Christian worship.

First, is the repetitive singing of a short piece of music. Repetitive to the point that the singing of them becomes an act of meditation. You likely have sung a Taize song, without even knowing it, since we also use them as choral responses in our Sunday worship, and of course in our own modified evening Taize style services, often in the season of Lent.

The second element is an extended period of silence. Not the brief pause we mark each Sunday as we silently confess our faults and flaws at the beginning of our service. When you are at Taize, the silence is a solid ten minutes, if not more. In the weeks that I was there, over 1500 young people gathered for worship three times a day and sat in perfect silence together.

The woman who was teaching the class, acknowledging that this extended silence can be unnerving for most people, told us a story. A man entered into a prayer service at Taize for the first time, and a little late after the extended silence had already just begun, and found his way to a seat on the ground next to one of the many local monks who typically sit dispersed throughout the congregation for prayers.

And then sat in silence for several minutes until it became unbearable. The man leaned over to the monk and whispered, "What are we waiting for?" Without missing a beat, the monk turned to the man and said, "The kingdom of God and the justice and joy that it will bring."

What are we waiting for these days? Waiting for peace? Waiting for reconciliation on a global, cultural, or interpersonal level? Waiting for healing? Waiting for change? Waiting for justice? Waiting for the near-constant influx of news of yet another tragedy or crisis to slow down to a manageable pace?

Our text from the Gospel of Luke today is all about waiting, waiting for the kingdom of God and the justice and joy that it will bring.

In this passage, Luke pulls together a variety of images, metaphors, and parables to help this first generation of Christians prepare themselves for what they expected to be the imminent return of Jesus Christ to the world.

It follows from earlier in this chapter the classic words of comfort that Jesus spoke about God's ability to care for creation and its creatures - the lilies and the grass and the ravens, reminding them that even the most practiced and skillful "worrier" cannot add a single day to their own life, and that through acts of faith a person can come to understand and believe that God will provide for them, Jesus then in our text this morning raises the anxiety level to about a ten.

Here is how they (and we) should prepare themselves - shrink their material footprint. You cannot take it with you, so instead, sell your possessions, give to charity, and start investing in heavenly treasures. Pack your spiritual "go bag," one might say, and keep it at hand. Second, get yourselves ready, put your shoes on, light your lamps, and open your eyes. The master will be here at any moment, and we need to be ready - the knock will come at the door, and as faithful servants, we should have our hands on the handle ready to welcome him inside. Lastly, develop a kind of situational awareness that keeps us poised to expect the unexpected. Unlike the master who will enter via the front door, we also need to be prepared for the thief in the night who will enter through the window.

Jesus is calling his followers, his disciples, to foster within themselves a vigilance that keeps them on high alert for his return.

Throughout these earliest Christian texts, it is clear, as I mentioned, that the timeline that the first Christians believed they were on in terms of the return of Jesus Christ coming in glory and the transformation of the world through the inbreaking of the kingdom of God, was much shorter than we have now come to understand and experience it. While in some generations an apocalyptic fever has taken over to reignite the idea of the imminent return of Jesus to the earth, for most Christians, we no longer find texts like this all that instructive when we think about our daily living and experience of God in the world. As Christians today, we live in a generations-long tension between the already of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and a not yet of his final return. And to be honest, not too many of us are all that tense about it.

Let me know if there is anything else I can help you with. But just because most of us today aren't living in a hyper vigilant state in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom of God, doesn't mean that the vast majority of us are still living in a hyper vigilant state for any number of other reasons.

Parents of all ages, anxious about making the right choices around school, sports, socialization, achievement, and discipline for our children, are never sure when to step in, when to let go, when to teach them what to do, and when to let them fail.

Anxiety about rapid changes in technology blurs boundaries around privacy, security, and identity, as artificial intelligence changes faster than we can understand the implications and impact of its use.

Environmental anxiety—sometimes called eco-anxiety—is increasingly affecting teens and young adults as they grapple with the realities of

climate change, biodiversity loss, and other ecological crises. Many experience a sense of urgency, helplessness, and grief about the planet's future, which can impact their mental health, daily choices, and long-term outlook.

Any one of us, no matter our political leanings, is growing simultaneously anxious and weary at the near constant stream of news characterized by conflict, incivility, posturing, and self-centeredness. We find ourselves reacting more than reflecting, catastrophizing rather than collaborating, doomscrolling on social media rather than doing something together in person with real human beings.

So rather than interpreting these admonitions from Jesus as just another thing that we are supposed to be vigilant towards, scripture and our shared practices of faith offer us a different way to wait, and to find peace, to find a place of rest, a place of sanctuary amid our vigilance and anxiety.

In her classic book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, therapist Rachel Naomi Remen talks about the need for anyone in a time of crisis to find a place of inner silence in order to refocus themselves. As an example, she talks about the chaos of a bull-fighting ring.

“There is a place in a bullring where the bull feels safe. If he can reach this place, he stops running and can gather his full strength. He is no longer afraid. From the point of view of his opponent, he becomes dangerous. This place in the ring is different for every bull. But it is the job of the matador to be aware of this, to know where sanctuary lies for each and every bull, and to be sure that the bull can never occupy this place of wholeness. In bullfighting, this place is called the *querencia*. She goes on - for humans, the *querencia* is a place in our inner world. Often, it is a

familiar place that has not been noticed until a time of crisis. Sometimes it is a viewpoint, a position from which to conduct a life, different for each person. Often it is simply a place of deep inner silence.”

So what if we understood these instructions from Jesus about waiting for the coming of the kingdom of God, not as much about being vigilant as they are about being intentional, making the space, holding the space, to keep vigil. Being vigilant or hyper-aware often heightens stress, as the mind remains on constant alert for threats or disruptions. In contrast, keeping vigil invites a steady, intentional presence—rooted in focus and calm—that allows one to watch and wait without being consumed by anxiety.

How can we find that place of safety that allows us to strengthen ourselves, our hearts, and our minds so that we can better face the waiting that is before us?

This fall, in coordination with our Middleton Counseling Center, our own BMPC member, Terry Charlton, is actually offering a class entitled Mind, Body, Spirit: The What, Why, and How of Managing Anxiety hoping to help us all answer that question. Terry and I chatted this week about how relevant it is in this moment to provide tools and habits for each other to lean into that ancient meditation tradition of practicing the presence of God.

When anxiety takes hold—whether in the middle of the day or the dark hours of the night—it can feel like there’s no way out of the spiral. Meditation techniques can teach us how to slow down, breathe, and return to the steady, calming presence of God’s love. Terry, in her teaching, specifically focuses on how our thinking shapes what we feel, and that

through practice, there are tools that can help us gently reframe those thoughts and coach ourselves past the overwhelming moments. Through prayer, movement, and attention to the mind–body–spirit connection, she will show us how to move our energy in ways that loosen tension and open us to God’s peace. This is not about ignoring what troubles us, but about learning how to be present to it in a new way—one that invites stillness, hope, and trust.

I hope that all of us who are feeling like we need a little help in managing our anxiety in these days will come and learn from Terry’s wisdom.

You might have noticed, or maybe you didn’t, that our passage for today, a passage all about being ready and on alert, actually starts with words of comfort, words of promise. But for me, by the time I get to instructions on masters and thieves coming at any moment, I have already forgotten them. Jesus starts by telling us not to worry, he calls us his flock, and he promises that the thing we are waiting for - the kingdom of God, an end to suffering, and end to war, an end to disparity and strife, and end to all the things that divide, it is all possible through him.

Maybe this is why the time of silence is so long in those Taize services, because it takes a minute or two or ten for us to let the noise of the world, of the mind to have there say and then move on, so that in the silence we can pay attention, so that we can be on the lookout for that gracious and loving master who will return, for the promise and comfort of God. What are we waiting for? The kingdom of God, and the justice and joy that has been promised.

Amen.