

3rd Sun. after Epiphany, Jan 25, 2009, year B: Psalm 62:6-14, BCP

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Of all the scriptures for today, the words which haunt me are these, from the psalm:

“For God alone my soul in silence waits;

Truly, my hope is in him.” (Ps. 62:6, BCP)

In my ministry, I see a lot of people who are waiting.

Waiting for surgery. Or waiting for healing after surgery. Or waiting through the day, the gift of yet another day of life. Or waiting knowing death is imminent. Or waiting with someone who is in the process of passing into life eternal...or with their family. Or waiting for medical test results. Waiting for a loved-one to come back from Iraq.

I'd like to tell you about some of the Trinitarians who wait with a quiet spirit for God alone.

Their fears and anxieties are silenced. Truly, their hope **is** in the Lord. They've built this relationship with a lifetime of practicing it...a lifetime of keeping it.

“For God alone my soul in silence waits;

Truly, my hope is in him.”

For example, Vashti Wilcox, Thelma's mother. I can't ask for her permission to tell you this because she's in heaven.

However, I **wouldn't** share the Vashti story if I didn't think she'd welcome my doing so. I can feel her presence smiling upon us with a nod of approval.

As she grew older, Vashti's tremendous energy, far-ranging activities, and mobility lessened. Now, mind you, this is the same 90 plus year-old woman about whom her daughter Thelma said, “but I don't let *Mother* use the treadmill unless **I'm home** with her!”

Nevertheless, one night at our contemplative prayer group Vashti was remarking that her physical activity had diminished. She explained to us how she started every day with the prayer called "In the Morning". She spoke it to us. (It's on the bottom of page 461 of the BCP if you want to follow along.)

"This is another day, O Lord.

I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be.

If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If

I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it

gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen."

In other words,

"For God alone my soul in silence waits;

Truly, my hope is in him."

Many of you know Ginny Roberts, who now needs enough care that she spends her nights and most of her day at Rock Haven. Recently Ginny told me she thinks that sometimes it's **easier** for people with a debilitating disease to wait patiently in God's presence. It's because they *know* this is their only option...to wait with God and trust...for "God alone".

Ginny spent her childhood and young adult life at home. But, as her physical difficulties from a spinal cord injury have progressed, she's moved in and out of several different residential institutions.

Ginny told me that when you are semi-confined to a place, as she is, it's easier after the first 6 months. At first you are impatient having to be there. You want to be somewhere else. You want to get somewhere else. Then eventually acceptance of the situation comes. Ginny's words were, "Courage comes. Waiting builds courage. You develop courage".

I asked Ginny how she has developed this courage by waiting...or this courage to wait.

“Well, I grew-up in a large family of seven.”

“What’s that got to do with waiting?”, I asked.

At first, she chuckled and said, “We had to wait for the bathroom!”

Then she added that another way she learned to wait as a child was by having to wait for her turn to open Christmas presents. “Sometimes at Christmas, with the cousins visiting, there were as many as 12 of us, and you had to wait for your turn to open your present. “

Ginny has had 14 surgeries in her life. With each surgery, she’s had lots of “pokes” for IV’s, blood draws, and such.

She described to me the last time in which she had to wait and endure the insertion of a PIC Line into her arm. “I *like* a PIC line”, she said, “because they use the **PIC line instead** of repeated poking with needles.” It’s like a tiny funnel which stays for a few days...a tiny funnel into a vein, and blood can be drawn out or fluid put in without repeated “needle poking”.

Here’s how she said she silenced her fears during the insertion of the PIC line.

She said, “I looked-up at the ceiling and concentrated on God, and envisioned my mom, and Fr. Bob.”

That’s what she put her attention to as she looked up at the ceiling. That’s how she silenced her mind and waited with the Lord, trusting.

“For God alone my soul in silence waits;

Truly, my hope is in him.”

Vashti **showed** us, and Ginny **shows** us **how** to wait. Remember the first line of the Serenity Prayer? “Lord, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.” Vashti and Ginny

show us the serenity of accepting their circumstances. They know what I too found in my darkest days: God never leaves us. If we can come to sit with God, God is always there to meet us, and to **stay** with us.

But, how do you add **hope** to the waiting?

Two more Trinitarians show us how to add hope: Don Boyd and Ella Fuller. I think the key to their spiritual wisdom is what the second line of the Serenity Prayer refers to. "Lord, give me the courage to change the things I can." What **is** the one thing we can change? Our attitude. We **can** control what we pay attention to. Don paid attention to the Lord, and Ella pays attention to the Lord. So did Vashti. So does Ginny. Simply put, they know the glass is half **full, not half empty**.

This week Ella gave me permission to tell you a story about her. Ella is another woman who was tremendously active in her earlier years. Some of you remember the Anderson Sisters' exclusive dress shop on Main Street. Ella flew routinely to the East and West coasts, shopping to stock the store. But if you know Ella, you know this wasn't an enterprise proudly or greedily focused on making profit off those who could afford the dresses. No, Ella enjoyed serving her customers, and serving them with interest and kindness. This is the same woman who nursed and cared for two brothers, a sister, and a husband. This is the same woman who will greet you today gently with sparkling eyes, a good attitude, and positive respect...even though she suffers and has suffered for years with a great deal of constant pain.

Once when I visited Ella in the hospital after she had fallen & had surgery, I read to her the prayer which I now call "Ella's prayer". Here's how it goes, and you can follow along if you'd like. This prayer is also on page 461 of the BCP, at the top of the page. It's named "For Trust in God".

“O God, the source of all health: So fill my heart with faith in your love, that with calm expectancy I may make room for your power to possess me, and gracefully accept your healing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

As soon as I started reading the prayer to Ella, she joined right in. Afterwards, she said, “Oh, yes, isn’t that beautiful. I know it by heart and say it every night as I fall asleep.”

**“For God alone my soul in silence waits;
Truly, my hope is in him.”**

Some of you remember Don Boyd & his resonant voice announcing Janesville High School ball games on the radio...or the daily news...or his and his wife’s enthusiastic involvement with *cursillo*. But at the end, he waited without his beloved wife, waited day after day not able to do much for himself because of his polio handicaps. What gave him hope? Partly, I think, it was his pragmatism: he just took what came in life, knowing God accompanied him. But also, true to *cursillo*’s Spirit, he saw Christ in everyone. He felt love for all humankind. This is reflected in what he chose as one of **his** favorite prayers. We’d pray it together at the end of every visit. You can find it in Evening Prayer (BCP p 124) and in An Order for Compline (BCP, p 134).

Together we’d pray:

“Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous, and all for your love’s sake. Amen.”

**“For God alone my soul in silence waits;
Truly, my hope is in him.”**

What’s the lever to tip bad circumstances to hope? How do you change the fulcrum to change the balance?

Surely Don knew and Ella knows **one** way: to “give thanks in all circumstances”. (1 Thessalonians, 5:18)

In the second place, each of these Trinitarians know they are loved, and they give a lot of love to other people. They **know** God's love, and living with that, paying attention to that, their attitude is changed. That change of balance despite bad circumstances is what Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians today when he says that grief, sorrow, or mourning will be changed to "not mourning", to "not grief". For, indeed, with **this** attitude "the present form of this world is passing away". (1 Cor 7:29-31) This is the good news to which Mark refers today.

A third thing to remember is simply that you are **saved!**

**"For God alone my soul in silence waits;
From him comes my *salvation*." (Ps. 62:1)**

"He alone is my rock and my *salvation*."(Ps. 62: 3 & 7)

Did you catch that change? From hope to salvation? That's even stronger. Salvation...that's the fulfillment of hope...now and in life eternal. Three times in this psalm God is named our salvation.

Our salvation enables us to know God's kingdom both **now** and in life **eternal**. Lillian Burdick knew this and spoke easily of salvation and hope during her last few months. No, I don't have Lillian's permission to tell you this; but, again, I can see her looking us straight in the eye just like the assured head-obstetrical nurse she was for so many years. She would say "of course you can tell them this. It's the **truth**, and it's what it's **all about**." I remember her now, and she **did** say simply and with confidence, "I know I am dying and each day coming closer to heaven. I'm ready. I have so much for which to be thankful. I am going to heaven."

Lillian was telling us the glass is **more** than half full. She knew her **cup was running over**, that a table was spread for her in the presence of whatever enemy. She knew goodness and mercy followed her all the days of her life, and she would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Ps. 23)

So, to Vashti, Ginny, Don, Ella, and Lillian, I say, “thank-you for preaching this sermon!”

Thank-you for showing us

For God alone my soul in silence waits;

Truly, my hope and salvation (are) in him.

Amen.