

The commercial was excruciating: a ketchup bottle poised over a hamburger, its contents creeping down the neck while Carly Simon sang “Anticipation.....is making me wait.”

We could all identify with creeping ketchup back then. We had our ways of speeding up the condiment’s pace toward our French fries. There was the tapping on the neck of the bottle at that perfect angle to ease the tomato-y goodness to its mouth. The shaking until it exploded in a huge red blast all over everything. Finally, sticking your knife into the bottle to move the ketchup along. Hurry ketchup – we don’t have time to mess around!

We don’t like to wait. No, we don’t like waiting at all.

We pay a lot of money a year to be sure we can get what we want in a download, or at maximum, 2 days. We grab lunch via drive-thrus. Black Friday can no longer be contained to one day. At the same time, we expect institutions to stand firm like large stones stacked on top of each other.

Jesus has a message for us: Nothing stays the same for long. For good or for bad, nothing stays the same. The present time may be fleeting and somewhat precarious, but God is constant. Don't be alarmed.

Our upcoming season of Advent is about waiting. Our texts this morning signal the anticipatory time to come. Indeed, one might say it's the opening parenthesis for a time pregnant for the reign of God.

Hannah can no longer keep her feelings of inadequacy and pain inside herself. Her husband is no help.

"Hey, you have me. I give you extra food. What's the problem?" says Elkanah. "You have no idea what it's like to be me," Hannah replies. And he doesn't.

Hannah retreats to the only place she knows she'll be heard – God's house. She pours out her pain and sorrow. She offers God a deal – let me have a son and I'll give him to you. After a moment of misunderstanding, Eli comes to her saying (in essence) "may it be with you according to God's word".

Lo and behold, Hannah goes back to Elkanah and soon becomes the mother of Samuel, who will become the one who anoints David, whose line will eventually lead to Jesus of Nazareth. In the same way Miriam rejoices at the deliverance of her people through the Red Sea, Hannah sings a song extolling the goodness of the Lord. At the end of Advent, a young woman named Mary will join this tradition of song.

The rejoicing of these tuneful women doesn't come without destruction. The Egyptian soldiers die in the sea. Hannah, as promised, gives up Samuel after he's weaned – probably somewhere around age 3 or 4. Mary's reputation is shattered to the point she nearly loses Joseph AND they are chased back to Egypt under threat of death. Nothing escapes perilous times.

What we see as danger and destruction, God sees as fertile ground for creation. Chaos becomes Calm, eventually. And, because there is little creativity in calm, chaos follows in short order. It's happened since the beginning.

Our Bible stories tell of God bringing the world out of the chaos of the waters, of saving Joseph from slavery to make him “vice-Pharoah” so that the Israelites would survive famine.

While I believe that the fierce-ness of recent weather disasters has been accentuated by what humanity is doing to our planet, glass ketchup bottles are now plastic squirt bottles or little foil packets to keep us from waiting. I also know that there is nothing new about hurricanes or earthquakes, fires or floods. Even natural disasters – bringing destruction that makes us cringe, the loss of life and property – eventually take the shape of new life.

Nothing stays the same forever.

So, what do we do now? Do we just wave it all off and say, “It’s God’s problem”?

Do we slink into our jammies and drink mulled wine while giving thanks that ‘stuff’ is happening to someone else?

I don't think so. And neither does the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, who urges us to live a life that is made holy by the gift of Christ's death and resurrection. If God can transform that nightmare into something benefitting all of humanity, then living in that reality will transform us.

Living a holy life gives us the confidence of Hannah, who trusted God with her pain and distress. It gives us hope that despite current darkness, light will shine again. A life of holiness is a life lived within community that meets regularly, worships together, and stirs each other up to see what God is calling us to through our baptisms.

Our communal life is necessary for us to know the stories of God's people and so that we might mature into citizens of God's reign and not disengage with the world around us. Rather, we can move out into the world firm in the knowledge that God is with us, working out the plan for justice for all.

We can build up walls of stone, but they will topple.

We can put our trust in stock markets, but they will falter.

Or, we can work with each other to build up the kind of world order talked about by Jesus with his disciples. A world without hunger, or homelessness, or plague, or oppression. That is a world that fills me with great antici

Pation.

Amen.