

Psalm 145 is one of the most reassuring and comforting passages in all of scripture. It is filled to near bursting with words of consolation, so many it's like the verses are competing with one another to be the most heartening, the most beautiful, the most likely to be pulled out and held to the light in moments of darkness and fear. Even within the limited number of verses that we heard today, there are couplets so powerful and sweet you want to write them down on a piece of good paper and carry them around in your pocket all day long. "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness." "The Lord is near to those who call upon him, to all who call upon him faithfully." "The Lord upholds all those who fall; he lifts up those who are bowed down." You, O Lord, are for us. You, Lord, are merciful and kind. You, Lord, are always ready to forgive us our sins, to lift us up when we fall, to draw us in to your embrace.

And then there is this verse: "The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season." What better words to write upon our hearts when we are waiting and worried and worn thin? We all have moments when waiting is a struggle, when we are desperate for an answer, for comfort, for healing, clarity, companionship. This psalm assures us that our waiting will not last forever, that God will come to us in the wait, find us and feed us with just the right food at just the right time. God will open wide God's almighty hand and satisfy us with sweet honey from the rock.

The trick about all of this, of course, is the timing. The psalmist reminds us that we wait for God's season, not ours. God knows when it is the due season; only the God who made us and loves us beyond measure can see clearly when the right time is upon us. This is meant as reassurance, that we whose lives have proven without a doubt that our timing can be deeply, critically flawed are not actually in charge here. God knows the hours and the seasons; God knows, so we don't have to. This

is intended as a comfort, but it requires faith and trust, and it's easier said than done. I'm guessing that many of us still find ourselves trying to push the hands around on the clock, saying, Now is the time for my prayer to be answered, God, thank you very much. We just can't seem to help ourselves sometimes; it's difficult to let go of the idea that that we alone know when the right moment is, when the due season has come.

The disciples fall into this trap again and again. They fell into it today, when they thought they knew, without a doubt, that the desert, at nightfall, was not the right time or the right place. To be fair, they weren't too far wrong. They knew how dangerous it was to be in the wilderness without food and water, and so did the people who had followed them there. Everybody knew that the desert was a wild and unforgiving place, a wasteland that showed no mercy and punished the unprepared. But off the crowds went anyway, clamoring after this miracle man, desperate to get a glimpse of the one who might be the Messiah, hoping to find holiness and healing in the hot desert sun. Thousands of people went tripping off into the desert without a care in the world, bringing their children with them, and only a handful of them thought to bring anything to eat for the journey. They had far too little and stayed far too long. Wrong time, wrong place.

The disciples thought it was the wrong time and place for Jesus, too. He had gone into the wilderness to get away from the people, not to lead a desert revival. Jesus had "withdrawn to a deserted place by himself" so that he could mourn in peace. They had just heard the news that John the Baptist was dead. The one who had baptized Jesus in the river Jordan, that prophet, that friend, had been killed in the most brutal way, a victim of manipulation, cowardice, and cruelty. Jesus had just heard this news, and he wanted to be alone, alone with his God and alone with his grief. But now here he is, standing in the midst of a sea of helpless, hungry people, with nothing at all to feed

them. Wrong time, wrong place.

And so the disciples tell him to send the people home. This is clearly not the time for him to have to worry about the needs of this neverendingly needy bunch. They can wait, just a little bit longer. Send them away, they tell him, send them to the right place at the right time, and they'll be able to feed themselves. But Jesus says no. Jesus says that these people could wait no more. Jesus says that they don't have to go anywhere - this is the right place, and this is the right time. Even when the disciples come back to him with their measly ingathering of five loaves and two fishes, he persists. He takes these offerings, small as they are, he blesses and breaks them, and then breaks them and breaks them again, and with each broken loaf, transformed by his own hands and his own prayers and his own compassion and kindness, the disciples' eyes are opened. They see Christ before them, proclaiming God's season, when the hungry are fed, the needy are satisfied, the sinful are forgiven, the broken are healed, the bowed down are lifted up, the righteous are heard, and everyone is seen and known and called by name. The disciples see that God does give them their food in due season, and that that season is right now.

There are times in life when we just have to wait. We'll wait for a job, for a vaccine, for a chance to visit family again, for a chance to sing together again, for Holy Communion. There will be times in our lives when the words of the psalm will be a lifeline in the darkness, times when we are waiting for Grace and wondering if it will ever come again. Sometimes we will be weary with waiting. But sometimes, too, *we will be too comfortable with it*. Today's Gospel reminds us that there are also times when the due season has come and God is waiting for us to move. There are times, many times, when Christ is standing before us, heart full of compassion and mercy, saying, "You give them something to eat." These people can wait no more. They don't have to go anywhere; I

have saved this world, made this the right place and the right time. I will keep transforming it, taking and blessing, breaking and giving, again and again and again, and I need your help. I need you to give them something to eat. I need you to be the hands that satisfy their needs. I need you to be the ones who are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great kindness. For there are so many people, so many of your neighbors, so many of my children, who can no longer wait. In the words of my faithful servant John Lewis, thousands of people have been told to be patient and wait for far too long. “They do not want [their] freedom gradually, but [they] want to be free now!”\* They are tired of being beaten by the police. They are tired of being tailed and profiled and dehumanized. They are tired of being in cages. They are tired of being told in the most racist language possible that they aren’t welcome in certain neighborhoods because of the color of their skin. They are tired of being told that they aren’t fully human because of their gender identity or sexuality. They are tired of being told that their problems matter less because they are poor or unhoused or addicted or mentally ill.

These people, my children, are deeply, profoundly tired – tired of being in the desert, tired of being hungry. But they are not alone. I am the Lord who is near to all who call upon me, and I have heard my people’s cry in the wilderness. This is the due season, my season of mercy, truth, justice, and love. There is no waiting for that in my Kingdom. I am, right now, opening my hand wide to take and bless and break all that my people will ever need. And I need you, my disciples, to carry that food into the world. I need you to be the bearers of my Grace, of this holy bread. Do not wait. Now is the time, and this is the place. You give them something to eat.

---

*Preached by Mother Erika Takacs, 2 August 2020, Church of the Atonement, Chicago*

\*Taken from Congressman John Lewis’s speech at the March on Washington on 28 August 1963.