

Lisa Lee
Sermon on 1 John 5:9-13
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We are the ones we have been waiting for. The last line of a poem written by June Jordan in commemoration of the 40,000 women and children who, on August 9, 1956 in South Africa, presented themselves in bodily protest to an expansion of the scope of apartheid laws to include women. These women of many ethnicities staged a march on the Union Building in Pretoria, singing songs of protest, with their children on their backs. They recognized the call to stand up, to respond to the injustices, and were successful in blocking the apartheid laws from being expanded. This kind of vital work, necessary work is such a powerful embodiment of participating in God's vision of restoration and shalom in this world. We are the ones we have been waiting for.

In our scripture passage today from 1st John, we hear that the testimony of God, testified to Jesus, has been given to us through faith. We have this testimony in our hearts. Just what is this testimony? God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son, Christ Jesus. This life being referenced, this "zoe" kind of life, is all about a fullness, abundance, vibrance in the here and now, rooted in and flowing from God. We are not talking about an escape from what is, or just a pie-in-the-sky, far-off departure from this life after we die. No, this testimony of God through Christ Jesus is the promise that the fullness of God's grace, mercy, and justice has entered into life now and we are called to join the Spirit in making it real.

Did you notice in 1st John 5, verse 10, that it says, "Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony in their hearts." This *having* seems to suggest that the message and promise of abundant life is a gift that has been given. Believing isn't

something we have to waste any time on trying or willing ourselves into -- it is all purely given, as we are brought into a loving relationship, of dwelling and being in God. This is who we are, freely given the gift of faith to freely join the Spirit in the work of bringing forth the restorative, just life in the world now.

We are the ones we have been waiting for. We have this testimony in our hearts. This all sounds very hopeful, does it not? What else do we know to be true of life?

One of my favorite podcasts is called "Everything Happens", with "for a reason" crossed out. Kate Bowler, who is an author and historian at Duke Divinity School, as well as a survivor of stage 4 cancer, diagnosed when she was 35, starts out each episode with these words: "In a world that promises endless progress, I realize I just need to be a person. It's hard to give up on the feeling that the life you want is just out of reach. If only you tried to eat this food, find that relationship, just get the kids graduated, or the parents this kind of care. Only then will I feel different, better, whole. But that's not the way this works. The world loves you better when you are shiny, when you are cheerful, when you still believe that your best life is right around the corner. There are some things we can change and some things we can't. And it's ok that life isn't always getting better. We can have beauty and meaning, community and love, and we will need each other if we are going to tell the truth. Life is a chronic condition, and there's no cure for being human."

We are the ones we have been waiting for, even as we accept life as a chronic condition for which there is no cure, even as we acknowledge this raw truth of the nature of our existence. We can have and bear the testimony of God's promise of the zoe, abundant life, even as we have and bear the stories of life in all its pain and

devastation. In today's Gospel reading, we are brought into a prayer that Jesus is lifting up on behalf of his disciples, just before he is handed over to the Roman authorities to be crucified. He says, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one." There will still be suffering and hardship, but no experience in the world is outside the reach of God's presence and protection. And as we live now in the post-resurrection reality, we can be confident of the redemption and hope promised through Christ Jesus -- even as we, like Jesus, still bear the wounds and marks of suffering in this life. This is an essential part of the testimony that we have in our hearts. The vulnerable, not-so-shiny pieces of our stories that we'd much rather sluff off, deny, or forget. But it is precisely into this fertile soil of our weaknesses that the power of God is made manifest, especially as we enter into one another's stories and open up to sharing our honest testimonies of the lives we have lived.

During my internship this past year, I have had the opportunity to make calls to check in with some members of the Advent community and offer pastoral care. Not having spoken with many of these people before calling them, I have given the invitation for them to share with me some of their life experiences, to bear witness to the sacred stories of good times and good memories, along with some nearly unbearable moments of deep sorrow and loss. I have been honored to enter into a place of holy listening and to engage in this time of dwelling together, held in the promise of God's presence and protection.

So, siblings in Christ, may you hear today that you have the testimony of God in your hearts -- the story of God's joy-filled, abundant, life-giving truth, woven into your unique story and the story we share together. Listen to your life and to the lives of those

around you, whether they are kin or strangers, for the cadence of hope, the rhythm of mercy, the song of justice -- flowing from within. Pay attention to what breaks your heart, or what makes your heart beat faster with excitement, as the Spirit may be stirring and calling you. No matter the testimony, whether it is marching in protest like the women fighting apartheid in South Africa, or simply waking up today, open to the possibilities of the day, you are blessed and loved, Spirit-filled bearers of eternal life. Amen.