

Column

Having just returned from two weeks in England, I am very familiar with hurrying and waiting. On this trip I stayed in Knaresborough, (Yorkshire), Oxford, Shrewsbury (Shropshire) and London. Needless to say, getting to and from each involved a lot of both hurrying and waiting.

You rush to the rail station hoping to catch the 9:42 or whatever the train's time . . . let's say, to Wolverhampton. Catching this train will enable you to connect with another service going to your destination. What happens? The train is delayed, or, you get on it and because of a switching problem down the line you wait, sitting at the station for 15 or more minutes before it finally moves. Or worse still, after waiting that time or longer, an announcement comes on saying that the service has been cancelled. You are directed to another train for the same destination. As often as not, this train is over-packed with people, and your journey is not that pleasant.

If hurrying and waiting is a part of travel, so it is with life. When you are young, you are in a rush to get to some magical age . . . let's say old enough to drive a car or date or whatever. Until that time comes – at least mentally – you have to wait. When you arrive at this destination, the cycle begins all over again.

Rushing and waiting – in a more positive sense – is part of the Christian life. St. Paul compares life to a race. In Philippians 3:14, he says: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." You can almost feel the wind across the apostle's face as he rushes forward, sprinting towards the finish line.

Paul's analogy of life as a race applies to all Christians. In early years, in particular, after being confirmed or making a conscious decision to follow Jesus as Saviour and Lord, there is often a burst of zeal. You want to do and dare and charge ahead.

Later, as life moves forward, the finish line comes more in view. You want to end well and hear those words, "Well done." So, you rush on, drawing your strength from the One who called you, and so you should.

But the Christian life involves more than a sprint to the finish line, more than pushing air and rushing forward. It also involves 'waiting on the Lord,' as the scriptures make clear.

Abraham in the Old Testament comes to mind. Early on, God promised him a big family, a family whose members would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea, but nothing happened. Abraham had to wait at least a quarter of a century for God's promise to come to fruition. Then and only then was a son born to him and his wife Sarah.

This time of waiting was not wasted. It gave the patriarch time to get to know the Maker of the stars better and for his faith to develop and mature. The same no doubt is true in our lives. There is a time for charging ahead, but also a time for standing still, listening and learning to lean on God and His promises.

The psalmist puts us onto the right track when he writes: "I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD" (Psalm 40:1-3).

"When darkness seems to hide His face, I rest on His unchanging grace," says the hymn writer. May this be our theme at whatever point we find ourselves in life. Whether moving forward or standing still, we are the Lord's. There is a place for both.

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which are profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Book of Common Prayer)

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