

“Now!”

New London UMC

Worship on April 14 & 15, 2024

Psalm 4 *UMH #741*; I John 3:1-7 *NRSV*

Rev. Joyce Rich

Sometimes when I read scripture I am particularly struck by how I hear it. And rightly, or wrongly, how I hear it sticks with me. For example, the first sentence of Psalm 4 says:

“Answer me when I call, O God of my right!”

This first sentence is the only thing that I could clearly remember about this psalm even though I know that I went on and read the whole thing! But what I HEARD in this first sentence sounded SO bossy and SO demanding that it alarmed me. And it triggered a memory of Varuca Salt. Do you know who she is? She’s a character from Roald Dahl’s 1964 book, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. But I first met her when I saw the 1971 movie adaptation of the book. And in the movie portrayal, Varuca Salt was SO bossy, and SO demanding, I could hardly believe it! I was really rather appalled by her. And I could not fathom how she could treat her father the way she did! Early on in the tour of the chocolate factory there’s a scene where she SHOUTS, “Daddy! Daddy! I want an Oompa-Loompa! I want an Oompa Loompa right away! I want to take it home with me! Go on, Daddy! Get me an Oompa-Loompa! . . . *I want an Oompa-Loompa!*” And her father appeased her by saying he’d see that she had one before the day was out. . . . However, in hardly no time at all, Varuca had yet *another* screeching demand:

<https://youtu.be/TRTkCHE1sS4?si=hZtwEWXXe7McnC-9>

After seeing Varuca in this clip, perhaps you can understand why the phrase, “NOW! Daddy!” seems to be seared into my memory forever. And it’s why I can easily imagine Varuca praying, “Answer me when I call, O God! Answer me NOW!” Because anything other than NOW would not be acceptable to her. . . . Even back in 1971 – before there was any talk of 1-per-centers – I knew that Varuca represented a very select number of people. That she was just a caricature of a spoiled, ultra-wealthy child who wouldn’t take, “No!” or “Not now,” for an answer when they wanted anything and everything. But today, in 2024, I fear that Varuca’s “I want it NOW!” attitude has become the norm in this age of instant gratification, where virtually anything can be available “on demand.” And it seems that almost everyone expects to have everything NOW. And to NOT get it NOW would be simply ridiculous! Why, if someone were to patiently wait for anything they would seem to be either foolhardy or looked at as strangely “old fashioned.”

This was on my mind the other day when I was reading Tish Harrison Warren’s book, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. I had come to the chapter where she was writing about being on the interstate, at a dead stop, with no one going anywhere. She wrote:

We are impatient people. We want happiness now. Fulfillment and gratification now. Time is just another commodity that we seek to maximize.

I get angry in traffic because it reminds me that time is not at my bidding. (p. 107)
. . . The reality is that time is a stream we are swept into. Time is a gift from God, a means of worship. I need the church to remind me of reality: time is not a commodity that I control, manage, or consume. The practice of liturgical time teaches me, day by day, that time is not mine. It does not revolve around me. Time revolves around God – what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do. (pp. 107-108, Liturgy of the Ordinary © 2016 Luitia Harrison Warren)

“Time revolves around God.” When I think about that, I think that means that God’s “now” is probably very different from Varuca’s “NOW!”

In our reading from the First Letter of John it says:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. 1 John 3:1-2a NRSV

Here we find a little hint of what God’s “now” might be like. It says that “we are God’s children **now**” – however, “what we will be has not yet been revealed.” That seems to stretch God’s “now” out a bit, doesn’t it? As if being “God’s children now” also includes however much time it may take for us to fully live into what it truly means to be God’s children. God is “now” present with us in this process of revelation and transformation. And it is God’s love for us that makes this possible, because the gift of God’s love is constantly, consistently, steadfastly “now” with us.

God’s loving “now” is open to all of God’s children, and all who will be called children of God. Which is vastly different from how Varuca’s self-centered “NOW!” immediately shut people out. Granted, Varuca may have loved manipulating her father to get what she wanted, but she didn’t seem to actually love her father. That lack of love for anyone besides herself left her feeling unfulfilled – no matter how many things she acquired. Her “NOW!” was always strangely empty. Whereas God’s loving “now” is always expanding to hold the abundance of life with all of God’s children.

Beloved, may we remember and celebrate that we are God’s children **now**; and that even more love is yet to be revealed.

Amen.