

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September

On hold



Many happy events have been deferred because of Coronavirus – weddings, big celebrations, holidays. The middle picture is a sighing after my own deferred journey along the coast of Norway at Christmas! Next year? Perhaps.

During our lives, most, if not all of us, have had to delay various happenings. Couples waiting to get married until they can afford it; waiting to have a home of our own until we can afford it; saving for the big holiday – how often money drives our waiting! But what is different now? I think there are several aspects.

Firstly, think back to times when a week or fortnight's annual holiday was all there was, or when our first home contained a lot of second-hand furniture passed on to us - or fobbed off on us! Deferral of hopes was part of life, but for years now this hasn't been the case for many with the advent of increased wealth and credit. Deferral comes hard. Then, more significantly, there is the matter of choice – we ourselves may choose to delay an event for many reasons, but it is our own choice. These delays are forced upon us and that has an altogether harsher feel. And then there is a general air of uncertainty – how long will this go on?

The phrase, "How long?" crops up in the Psalms of lament: how long must I suffer, how long until the wicked get their just deserts, how long are the people to suffer under the heel of the oppressor? How long? And we ask, how long are the people to suffer under the constrictions of the pandemic, and answer is there none.

And then, of course, there are the delays to medical procedures and this particular delay brings great pain and stress to add to the overall worries.

Let's look at St. Paul. In his letter to the Philippians, he speaks of his own circumstances in prison, and of the ways in which his imprisonment has actually aided the spread of the Gospel in that the imperial guard is now aware of the Gospel, and because his situation has actually made his fellow Christians bolder in speaking out. (**Philippians 1: 12-18**). Then comes a very positive statement.

**Philippians 1:18b-26** Paul will continue to rejoice – rejoice, even though his plans and dreams have been put on hold. Whatever happens to him, whether he lives or dies, Christ will be exalted.

Paul approaches death with equanimity: “Living is Christ and dying is gain.” In fact, he wants to be with Christ in death, which is not the cry of the terminally depressed but a straightforward statement that when it’s time, he’s ready. In the meanwhile, he is content to remain for the people he is encouraging in faith and in joy.

I find this a great word for the present moment. Whatever is to come and whatever our circumstances now, we can live our lives in a way that shows the Gospel in our finding of the contentment to be exactly where we are, for what we can do and be here and now.

Pause for a moment. What have you had to delay or lose because of the pandemic?

If the issue is a hard one, let yourself grieve the loss,  
but also let Christ put his arms around you to comfort you.



*Matthew 23: 37b*

#### A Prayer

At this time of great uncertainty, of delay and disappointment,  
we come before you, Eternal God, who was and is and is to come,  
whose presence in Christ is with us always, no matter what the circumstances of our lives.  
We thank you for that presence, that strength upon which we can rest secure  
and for the guiding and comfort of your Spirit, with us always.

In an uncertain time in our own nation, we pray for those tasked with making decisions  
that affect us all now and in the future.

May they be guided by your Holy Spirit to pause and reflect  
on how these decisions will affect the poorest in society.

Lord, bring wisdom and compassion in all decision-making we earnestly pray.

And in

In the world are many people suffering crippling uncertainty –

❖ of employment and of finance, of housing, food and drink

❖ of delays of many kinds

We bring those worrying at the delay of medical procedures,  
those who are ill or in any kind of distress,  
that they might find healing of body and spirit.

We bring those fretting at the delay of weddings, of moving house,  
of longed-for meetings with family and friends and longed-for holidays.  
Hold them, we pray in this present moment, bring a calming of anxiety,  
and acceptance of the joy and the potential of the here and now,  
and the continued looking forward to what can be.

As we rejoice in the ongoing reopening of churches for worship,  
we bring those fellowships who have had to delay reopening,  
or who are reopening with a sense of trepidation,  
that they may find renewed blessing in being together, in shared prayer. In peace.  
Help us all, wherever we are, find joy and hope in this present moment so that,  
strengthened, we can face whatever delays and uncertainties await us in the future.  
We ask it in Jesus' name, he who gave his life that all may have life in its fullness.  
Amen

*An apology, for we none of us are perfect. In last week's Thoughts, Exodus 11:15 should have read Numbers 11:15. Well done the person who spotted that!*

*Blessings, Ruth*