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## *Waiting with Patience*

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**A sermon by the Rev. Canon George M. Maxwell, Jr.  
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 11A**

*For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But, if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.-- Romans 8:24-25*

She was born in New York City to a family of vast wealth and privilege. Yet, these advantages did not quiet her spirit. They did not leave her content with things as they were.

Anna Eleanor Roosevelt is said to have endured a childhood characterized by more than the expected amount of insecurity and fear. She was named after her mother and father, both of whom died before she was ten years old. She was beautiful in ways not always recognized by the gendered prejudices of her world.

Her papers reveal that she considered herself "ugly" when she was growing up. Yet, when she was only fourteen years old, she wrote, "no matter how plain a woman may be, if truth and loyalty are stamped upon her face, all will be attracted to her."

It seems that Roosevelt understood from an early age something about what Paul means when he calls us to wait with patience.

And, this fruit of the spirit - waiting with patience - is a good metaphor for the Christian life. We believe, after all, that we have seen the future. We believe that we have heard God's promise of new heavens and a new earth.

Yet, we live in the present. We live with the awareness that what will be, what Christ has already begun, is also not yet here.

We live, in other words, in anticipation - working hard to act now as if the future is already here.

Although Eleanor Roosevelt's character reflects this virtue of patience in many instances, none stands out like the story of her relationship with Marian Anderson.

Roosevelt first met Anderson in 1935. The young black singer was invited to perform at the White House, after she had been enthusiastically received in Europe's most famous concert halls.

Beginning in 1936, Anderson sang an annual concert for the benefit the Howard University School of Music in Washington, D.C. As her fame and reputation grew, so did the popularity of these concerts. Organizers had to find larger and larger venues each year.

In January of 1939, Howard asked the Daughters of the American Revolution for permission to use its Washington, D.C.

auditorium, Constitution Hall. Constitution Hall housed the DAR's national headquarters and hosted its annual conventions. It was the largest auditorium in the capital, with a seating capacity of 4,000.

The petition was denied.

At first, Howard was told that the Hall was already booked. But, after alternate dates were also rejected, it became clear that there were other reasons behind the decision.

Ultimately, it became known that the DAR had agreed to a "white performers only" policy to quiet protests of several of the donors who had given money to build the facility. The donors objected to the practice of seating whites and blacks together at concerts of black artists.

Artists, politicians, newspapers, radio stations, and a new organization called the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee attempted to pressure the DAR into making an exception. But, the organization held its ground.

Roosevelt was a member of the DAR. She had been extended a membership card when her husband ascended to the presidency after the 1932 election. She decided not to challenge the DAR's decision publicly. They would not listen to her, she reasoned. And, there were plenty of more active members who would come out against it.

Instead, she decided to support Marian Anderson in a different way. She agreed to present the Springarn Medal to Anderson at the upcoming national convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. And, she invited Anderson to perform at the White House again - this time for the King and Queen of England.

As the controversy over Anderson's exclusion from Constitution Hall continued, however, Roosevelt began to realize that there wasn't going to be any real protest from within the organization. There wasn't going to be a groundswell of more active members of the DAR challenging the discriminatory policy.

So, she became active again. In late February of 1939, realizing that she was going to antagonize a number of her husband's supporters, Roosevelt resigned from the DAR. She also sent a telegram to the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee expressing her disappointment that Anderson was being denied a concert venue.

Roosevelt explained her reasoning in her "My Day" column, without explicitly referencing either Anderson or the Daughters.

"The question," she said, "is if you belong to an organization and disapprove of an action which is typical of a policy, should you resign or is it better to work for a changed point of view within the organization?"

Usually, she chose to fight from within. Sometimes, she says, she lost her battles and decided later that she had been wrong. Sometimes she lost and realized when things ultimately moved in her direction that "she had simply been a little too far ahead of the thinking of the majority at that time."

But, here, fighting from within felt like moving backwards. She could not find a way to do any of what she called "active work." To do nothing would have signaled support for an action that she deeply opposed. It would have given others the false comfort that she believed that no change was needed - that things were just fine as they were.

Eleanor Roosevelt was waiting with patience.

She knew that some things take time and simply must be endured for awhile. She understood that she could not always be in control. She understood that, sometimes, she had to let others determine exactly where she was going, how she would get there, and when she would arrive.

She also knew, however, that waiting is not the same thing as just standing around. It has an active character. We are almost never in control of the outcome. We can let that anxiety go. The future has already been determined.

But, we are called to anticipate it. We are called to live now as if the future is already here - as if God's promises have already been realized. And, that almost always requires that we do something.

Roosevelt did find some "active work" to do. Working with others behind the scenes, she promoted another venue for the concert. She arranged for Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday.

This was a fascinating choice.

Abraham Lincoln, at least the larger-than-life marble sculpture that sits in his Memorial, has always made me think that he knows something that I don't -- as if he is just sitting there waiting to see if I will figure it out.

His Second Inaugural Address is carved on the north wall to his left.

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations."

The Gettysburg Address marks the south wall to his right.

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that "all men are created equal."

He is, I think, waiting in patience.

He has already done all that he can do. Now, he must wait. He knows it will take time. He knows that he must now depend on God and others to determine exactly where we are going, how we will get there, and when we will arrive.

I leave you with this final image of Eleanor Roosevelt waiting with patience.

Marian Anderson is standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. The knowing face of Abraham Lincoln sits stoically behind her.

It is April 9, 1939. Easter Sunday.

Anderson stands tall, a solitary figure of dignity and grace. Seventy-five thousand people crowd together in front of her. (Millions more are thought to be listening on the radio.) Black and white, they are dressed for church. There is a subtle movement -- back and forth, up and down. They are all hoping to catch a glimpse of her.

She closes her eyes. And, in a rich, vibrant contralto, she gives voice to the gathered body. Her words ring out across the mall -- "my country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty."

It is an Easter moment.

At least for one moment, the future is already here. You suddenly know what a new heaven and a new earth will look like, feel like, and sound like. The joy of participating in such a moment is so real that you know you will always remember it.

You just know somehow that your life will never be the same.

And, Eleanor Roosevelt, where is she?

She's not there. It is not her day. She declined to appear, because, as she said, this day belongs to Marian Anderson.

Amen.

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