



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

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“The Waiting Room” (Acts 1:1-14) The Lord’s Supper Congregation’s Officer Elections

It seems like a couple of times a month, I feel really silly as I finally “get” what some common phrase means, or how it got started. It’s embarrassing to me because I’ve used that word or phrase almost all my life, but I see now that I didn’t really know what it meant (at least, originally). “A stitch in time saves nine,” goes the proverb (which I think is from Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanac*.) Just last month I figured it out. The proverb is talking about a rip in one’s clothing. If you give it a stitch before there is more strain on the cloth, you prevent a large tear that would take some 9 or 10 stitches to close up later. I guess I confused that proverb with “just in the nick of time”, or something. It had become so clear to me after all those years, and I felt foolish.

I think that was similar to one of the many feelings within Jesus’ disciples through the period of his death, and even reports of his resurrection, and even their witnessing Jesus alive, by God’s power. Jesus still had to teach, still had to do more. The disciples still didn’t “get” it about him.

This is the last Sunday of the church season of Eastertide, when the church around the world has been reading the accounts of Jesus’ post-Easter resurrection appearances. Next Sunday is Pentecost, remembering the Holy Spirit event with Jesus’ first disciples. So today we read the record of Jesus’ last bodily connection with his followers. We’ll read the Acts chapter 1 version, so please open your Bibles to Acts (that’s in the New Testament, after the gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). At the start, you’ll hear Luke’s voice, introducing this book as he introduced his earlier gospel book. It picks up right where his gospel left off—it’s “volume two” of Luke’s gospel, really. “Volume one” is his story of Jesus; “volume two” is his story of Jesus’ church. Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud.

[Acts 1:1-14]

Can you imagine? God is working right in front of them. How do you respond to that? I imagine the disciples watch Jesus rise to God, and it’s as though everything stops. They can’t stop looking up. Their minds are blank, their bodies frozen—not in fear, but in wonder. They have no category for this, no words to use. How long do you suppose they were looking up? No one speaks. Finally, God appears through two angels to shake them out of it. Go on, go home, they say. Jesus will come back.

So they begin to slowly make their way to that upper room of the house where they had gathered. Traditionally, the church marks 40 days after Easter with the occasional appearances of Jesus to his followers, then this Ascension, and then 10 more days until the Holy Spirit comes.

I imagine they get to the house. No one wants to start up the stairs that are set into the outside wall, built double-thick to support the mud stairs. Finally one, then another start up the stairs, and they all get into the room and shut the door. No one speaks. That's what the presence of God ought to do—fill us with such awe that we are struck speechless.

Tense silence has never been comfortable for Peter, however, and he suggests they fill the vacancy left by Judas the traitor, so they can be at the same number Jesus had originally appointed. They have an agenda at last. And they start suggesting names. They ask God's help, they cast lots, and the vacancy is filled.

Now, let's see—what had JESUS told us to do? Oh, yeah—“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.” The disciples are puzzled about what this “gift” might be. But the clear part was “stay” in the City. Stay. Sit. Wait. For how long? For what?

So they start showing up every day; many of them sleep on the floor of this upper room. It gets more awkward—though people in Bible culture had a much longer sense of “normal time” than we do--the days drag on. They eat together, but the meals are pretty quiet. Waiting. One day stretches into two, then three, then four.

How well do you wait for service you feel you have a right to expect? “Your” doctor, “your” car repair garage, waiting to cast “your” vote, waiting to order at a restaurant “you” have chosen, waiting for your wife to be ready to go, . . . Those are definite, right-now waiting times. But we also have indefinite times of waiting. We wait for the college acceptance letter—we don't know when it might come, and we check the mailbox every day. We wait for the results of our medical test, but the lab had some people on vacation, their work was backed up, and the results are not in when expected. Waiting for critical news is painful—often more painful than the tests themselves. We wait for news about our missionary friends who have been captured near the Thai-Burma border—that happened this week. These can be excruciating, because the impact of what we wait for may have more important consequences. How well do you wait, in these situations?

What do you do when you have to wait? Again, a lot depends on our perception of time. In Bible culture, time goes by slowly and that's OK. People walked everywhere; there was no mass media or computers to speed up one's sense of time. The New Testament Greek has two words for time. “*Chronos*” is the word for “duration of time”. Any family that has taken a vacation with the kids and hears “Are we there, yet?” knows what *chromos* time is. The other word for time is “*kairos*”, and kairos is used for the significance of time, for a time set by God's plan.

In the Bible, when we hear verses like “wait upon the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart,” we may hear that as impatient frustration. “Darn—I have to wait.” But Bible people would hear that differently. “Waiting” for them would be eager anticipation--on tip-toe--like waiting for summer vacation from school. Bible examples would be, waiting for the punishment of Exile in Babylon to be completed, or waiting for the God's Messiah to come. How we wait seems to depend on what we are waiting FOR, doesn't it?!¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;

be strong and take heart (Psalm 27:14a)

Yeah, but. . .but in some respects the disciples were like us in their waiting. Remember the first thing they said to the Risen Lord in our text today was to ask, “Lord, is this the time you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” Is this it? “Are we there, yet?” They want to be in control, to know the plan of God. It’s the same with us. The worst thing about all the kinds of waiting we’ve talked about is loss of control. We can’t get what we want how we want it when we want it, and it drives us crazy.

So, what do you do while you wait? If we’re not prepared to wait, we start wasting time by picking up the old issue of *People* magazine on the doctor’s waiting room table until our name is called. Lately, for companies on the Internet, if you have to call in for customer service, they will give you an “estimated wait time”. Or, they will tell you how many people are ahead of you in line. That helps some, but if we know we’re going to be on the phone sitting there idly for five minutes, what do we do? What did Jesus’ first disciples do, while they were spending this indefinite time in their “waiting room”? It seems pretty clear, as we’ll see next week, that they kept up their anticipation—probably increased it to a fever pitch—while they waited for this “power from on high”, whatever that could mean. How did they do that?

Here’s what I think. I think after a day or two of awkward silence, perhaps during their sleeping dreams that first night, God started tickling their memories and intuitions, starting to form a new paradigm in their hearts and minds. Perhaps on the second day, or the third, or the fourth, one of them was the first to speak out loud about their dream, or suddenly to blurt out, “I was thinking . . .” And he or she would quote something Jesus said or remember something he did. And then they would go on to say, “You know, it just occurred to me that this is just like . . .”, and they would recite a prophecy from their Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) that Jesus might have been fulfilling.

A buzz goes up around the room. Another pipes up, “Remember when Jesus spoke on the mountain? ‘You have heard it said, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”. But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” [Matthew 5:38-39, NIV] It was kind of like he was taking the words of our Prophet Moses [Exodus 21:24] in the book of Exodus, and replacing them. Who could say such a thing unless God was with him?”

Another buzz around the room. A gal chimes in: “My father used to teach us girls at home. One of his favorite prophecies was the one from old Isaiah,

⁵ ‘But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ ‘We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.’ [Isaiah 53:5-6]

When our Jesus was arrested, beaten to a bloody pulp and hung on that cross to die, he did not deserve any of that. It was lies, all of it. But look what’s happening to us! Our fear is being lifted. Our despair is melting away. He is healing our faith. He has opened heaven for us!”

Now what was a buzz grows into a roar. First one, then another, then still another. They are starting to “connect the dots”, as we would say. There is a new light in their eyes. They are no longer just “hanging out”, waiting for time to pass. Now they are solving puzzles and riddles of the most remarkable life the world has ever seen. They not only have “seen Jesus”, they are beginning to realize they have “seen the walking, talking planned Savior sent from God”. THIS night, when they finally drift off to sleep, they can hardly wait for the next morning, and they are eager to be together and assemble these connections.

So when Peter gets up days later at Pentecost, he has something to say! He clearly has gotten it about Jesus by then, as Acts 2 will show, though he had not “gotten Jesus” up to the end of Acts 1. This “waiting room” has been transformed into a meeting with the Almighty. “Hallelujahs” pop out from time to time, and no one bats an eye. This hideous hideout has become holy, a place of meeting with God. Their excitement does not fade, it builds. It’s ready to boil over, as we’ll see next Sunday.

How do you spend your “wait time”? I try to take something I chose to read, or take some paper to work on sermon ideas. At least, that’s productive when I have some of that right-now waiting time or indefinite waiting time that I feel I just have to spend. If I have high anticipation, however, it’s hard for me to concentrate on other reading, or productive work. My attention is captured by anticipation. I keep my eye on the door, or listen intently for the service rep to get to my call.

There is one more kind of waiting I want to put before you this morning: waiting for God to speak to You. I feel like the church should apologize to many of you for the poor way we have empowered you to connect with God. Most church people don’t really believe that prayer is a conversation with God. If all you do is attend church worship, you might get the idea that prayer is listening to the minister talk to God on your behalf. Without realizing it, most of you picked up that pattern—or the idea that prayer is all “us, talking”, whether you do the talking or I do the talking. If God even wanted to communicate with us, we wouldn’t let Him get a word in edgewise!

But prayer IS a conversation, the Bible shows us. God DOES speak, through various means (what I have called “channels”, like channels on your TV). I think most of us don’t hear from God because of our “waiting problem”. It’s as though we demand God show up at our convenience.

If we really wanted to hear from God, wouldn’t we make it at HIS convenience? Our story today shows us that. Jesus told his disciples to wait. They obeyed—even though that seemed to mean, doing nothing. But the waiting was necessary for them to hear from God, so the Holy Spirit could start making those connections between the Scriptures and their memories of Jesus.

How long are you willing to wait for God to show up? Are you willing to look for Him patiently?

Before you turn to sleep tonight, sit down in a chair, take some time to allow yourself to grow quiet, and then ask God to speak to you. Then “play back the video”

of this day, and imagine Jesus sitting in a chair next to you, watching the video with you. What do you feel from him, as the video of this day rolls along, and the conversations you remember, the people you saw, the thoughts you had come up?

What is God teaching you through this review of your day?

If there is a big “a-HA!”, thank God for that—and write it down. If there is no big “a-HA”, then thank God just for spending this time with you. Maybe, instead, God will show up in your dreams that night. . . .!

Such time with God could redeem your whole day. Imagine what it could do if you did this at the start of a day, imagining a video of what is likely to happen—who you are planning to see, what you are planning to do. What does God want you to notice as you meet this person? What would Jesus like in each of these conversations or activities?

And be prepared for surprises! God does that, a lot!

We can wait, or we can WAIT! How will you wait, next time you have the chance? It’s your choice, and mine. Maybe you could turn a waiting into a real-time, right-now conversation with God. Imagine that! Each waiting room becomes a holy place where you meet with God. No more killing time, but filling time with God.

(INTRO TO COMMUNION)

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on May 4, 2008, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]