

First Presbyterian Church  
"The Marks of the Church: Waiting"  
Rev. Dr. John Judson  
April 24, 2022

Psalms 130:1-8; Acts 1:1-14

I want to give you a word of warning this morning. If you are ever in a grocery store and you see me in a checkout line...do not get behind me. If you are ever traveling down Maple or Telegraph or any other road and see me driving. Get in another lane. If you ever see me at an ATM at the bank...go find another branch. I say this because I have been cursed with always being in the slow lane of everything. I say cursed because if anyone hates waiting it is me. I hate waiting for the microwave to finish. I hate waiting for water to boil. Now it may be that there are others here who dislike waiting as much as I do. So, let's do a quick poll. How many of you here this morning enjoy waiting? Well, I see that I am not alone. I suppose there might have been a time when people didn't mind waiting, but I am not sure when that was because both of our passages this morning show people's impatience with waiting.

The Psalmist has been waiting for God to forgive and restore. Listen again to the words. *"Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."* This is a person who desperately wants God to restore them but is forced to wait, and wait and wait. And the waiting is painful. The disciples are forced to wait as well. They want to know when Jesus is going to restore the kingdom...the answer is, wait. They want to know when Jesus is coming back...the answer is, wait. They want to know when the Spirit is to arrive...the answer is, wait. And I would guess that they are as happy with waiting as was the Psalmist and as are you and I.

I think one of the reasons we hate to wait is that waiting seems like a waste of time. When we have things we want to accomplish, places we want to go, personal transformations in which we want to engage, people we need to see...waiting appears to be stealing time from us; stealing time that we cannot get back. And yet, from a Biblical perspective, waiting can be some of the most productive time there is. To gain some insight into this idea, let's return to the wilderness...the wilderness in which the people of God were sent when they fled from Egypt. They spent forty years waiting to leave the wilderness and enter the Land of Promise. That seems like a lot of waiting. Yet that period of waiting was one of discovery and discernment. It was a time of discovery because in their waiting they could receive the Torah, the Law of God. Because they were not busy building new lives and conquering new territory, they had time to listen and receive. In the same way, that time of waiting allowed them to discern that in following Torah they would find life and hope.

This is the same kind of moment in which I believe the disciples found themselves. They had followed Jesus for three years. He had been crucified and yet God raised him from the dead and he was with them for another forty days, appearing to them and to others. Now, however, Jesus was gone. His physical presence was no longer with them. The Spirit had not yet been fully manifested to instruct

them. And so, the disciples...meaning not just the twelve, but many more, both men and women, were forced to confront a new reality. They were forced to confront the reality of a life of faith without Jesus. Did this mean returning to a whole hearted Judaism? Did this mean returning to their old jobs and businesses? Did this mean that they were to see themselves more as followers of Jesus, or Torah, or a combination of the two? Did this mean telling others about Jesus and if so, what ought they to tell them? What would they tell them about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? If the Spirit had arrived instantaneously, I don't believe the disciples would have been able to discover and discern who they were supposed to be, what they were supposed to proclaim, or what it was they believed about Jesus and what he accomplished. Waiting gave them that chance. I say this because when Pentecost arrives, the disciples have their messaging prepared and ready to be revealed.

We are in a similar situation in that we at First Presbyterian Church are waiting. We are in that strange waiting time between the announcement of my retirement and the welcoming of a new senior pastor. For many this might seem like nothing more than a lame duck waiting period. Yet it is not. I say this because we have been about the business of discovery and discernment during these months. We invited everyone in the church to participate in the Holy Cow survey. This survey asked people's attitudes about the church, its mission, its ministry, its direction, and its leadership. We then conducted listening sessions with a wide variety of individuals throughout the church. In those sessions we gained more insight into people's views about the purpose and direction of the church...and tomorrow one of the members of the listening team is meeting with program staff to share some suggestions that came out of those meetings. And now we are engaging in a sermon series that will help us wrestle with not only the purpose of the church in general but of our church in particular. Thus, this time of waiting is an intentional time of discovery and discernment intended to help us continue to be the church that Jesus Christ has called us to be.

Finally, waiting can be a time of discovery and discernment for individuals as well. What I mean by that is that I believe that each of us is called to periods of waiting so that we can discover more and more who God desires us to be. Let me ask, how many of you have spent any significant time asking questions such as: what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? What does the resurrection and the possibility of new life mean for me? How does my life reflect the love and grace of God in Jesus? What does it mean for me to be a part of Everybody's Church? How am I living out the commitments that I made to children and their parents who have been baptized in my presence? These questions are not about making any of us feel guilty or inadequate. They are instead questions that are intended to help us discover and discern who we are to be. What I am going to do then is challenge all of us to take one of these questions and wait on it. Spend time with it between now and Pentecost. Spend time reflecting on your chosen question; asking questions about it, reading about it, and seeing if this time of waiting that we share with the disciples can be a time of post-Easter growth.