

Sermon for June 27, 2021

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Lamentations reads “The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence...”

It is good that one should wait...

Waiting...

Often we talk about waiting as something we must do because something has failed to operate optimally. We create solutions to solve the problem of waiting. You used to have to wait in long lines – now theme parks have fast passes and grocery store have express check outs. You used to have to wait for stores to open or deliveries to arrive – now we have online ordering and Amazon prime. Whole industries have been created to solve the problem of “the wait.”

This past month I have watched as my daughter has tried to cope with wait times as she has waited after tryouts and auditions for team placements and cast lists to post, waited between job interviews to learn if she would be offered the job, waited after ACT tests for test scores. Laughingly she closed her laptop and declared, “Guess I can’t just sit here and wait for news to arrive in my inbox all week huh? Maybe I should just sleep through the next few days until I can find out.” We often struggle with how to get through the dreaded wait.

It is good that one should wait...

In today’s gospel reading we encounter two very different stories of waiting. The Gospel of Mark begins with the story of Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, coming to Jesus and begging Jesus to come and lay his hands on his little daughter that she might live. As Jesus and Jairus begin in the direction of Jairus’ home, they are surrounded by a crowd and a woman approaches Jesus from behind. This woman has been waiting to be well for 12 years. Her condition of hemorrhaging would not have only been a physical ailment but also would have kept her socially isolated and spiritually removed from temple life. She has been waiting for 12 years to re-enter community living. Having heard about Jesus she reaches out and touches his cloak. And our text says “Immediately” her hemorrhage stops and she is healed and “immediately” Jesus is aware that “power has gone forth from him. Her wait has ended immediately in her encounter with Jesus.

While healing is immediately brought to this woman and Jesus immediately responds to her, Jairus is now the one left waiting beside Jesus. His little girl is left waiting for healing. During this wait, people arrive from Jairus’ house and tell him that his daughter has died as he waits for Jesus. Jesus turns to Jairus and says “Do not fear, only believe” and he proceeds to the child, reaching out to her with the words “Little girl, get up!” And then the text reads “immediately” this 12 year old girl got up.

It is good that one should wait...

The Hebrew word for “wait” translates “to hope, to expect, to eagerly look for”. The woman and Jairus hope, expect, eagerly look for healing. It is rooted in a concept of “stretching” and related to the word that means “to bind together” or “to gather”. As they wait they are stretched and gathered. Waiting is not passive but active. Waiting, and the way we embrace or resist the wait, has the ability to shape and impact our journey. It may be in the wait that we give God the space to stretch us and bring us close to God and one another.

In the 12 years of waiting for healing, the woman has exhausted all sources of healing. This journey has drawn her into the crowd to reach out for Jesus. As Jairus waits at Jesus’ side, he as a leader of the synagogue witnesses Jesus’ encounter with this nameless woman who has been unclean. In the wait, the space before the “immediately”, Jairus gets to hear Jesus speak, “Do not fear, only believe.” In both stories there is a waiting and then a reaching for or reaching from Jesus and then immediately a change-new life. While we long for the “immediately” is the wait important for the coming change and new life?

We live in a world that longs to get past the wait, that has taught us that everything must be immediate. However, sometimes it is the wait that brings us to reach for Jesus. Sometimes it is in the wait that we witness the acts of God and hear a word from the Lord.

A few years ago as I waited for biopsy results following the discovery of my thyroid tumors the wait was painful. I felt physically ill waiting for news and a course of action. But something happened in the waiting. The wait brought me to reach for Jesus, to witness the acts of God around me that I otherwise would have rushed past. In the wait I heard a word from the Lord.

What if we aren’t just supposed to get through the wait times but rather embrace the wait as an important part of the journey of life and faith? As we are coming out a pandemic season of waiting – what if we embrace the wait that was and is as an important part of the journey? Has this wait brought us to reach for Jesus? to witness new acts of God? To hear a word from the Lord?

An adapted reading from Don Postema reads:

May the wait create space for...

Solitude that you may find out who you are,

Silence that your words may mean something,

Reflection that your actions may have significance,

Contemplation that you may see the world as it really is,

Prayer that you may be conscious of God.

Hopefully we do not just sit and stare at our screens longing for the wait to end or sleep through our wait times. Embrace the waits. It is good that one should wait...for the salvation of the Lord comes.