

WAITING ON THE LORD

Jan. 3, 2010

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As you know, I have preached a few sermons over the 17 years Vicki and I have been at Wallingford Presbyterian, and a couple in other churches. Julie Young said it best when we were talking about why we volunteer to spend many hours trying to create something meaningful to say for 20 minutes up here on a Sunday. She said that while she hopes and prays that some of her thoughts touch some of those listening, that preparing a sermon forces intensive study (and I would say reflection) benefitting the sermon giver, perhaps more than anyone. In short, preaching is a good way to stimulate your own Christian life, and remind yourself of some lessons. I would encourage many others sitting here today to give it a try. The other consideration is that not being “classically trained in the art of preaching” I think that at times we lay-people can shake things up a bit and cause some corresponding reaction and questions from all of you sitting out there. I hope that might occur now....

I think it was last summer that I complained to Ken that he should try first to fill the pulpit from inside rather than bringing in someone who sort of makes the rounds here in the region. He responded that that would be great and in a very nice way encouraged me to put my money where my mouth was. I personally think this is the very sort of thing pastors should do—push their congregants to be authentic and responsible. While I don’t claim to manifest those qualities as often as I should, I was compelled to shake my head in affirmation and agree to preach today.

Right away I knew what I wanted to think about and share. As the title suggests---- I want to talk this morning about **Waiting on the Lord**. When I say those words two things immediately come to mind. The first is the play I saw and found quite boring many years ago – Waiting for Gadot. My memory of that is of two people filling the time they were waiting for their friend by shooting the breeze. These random and incrementally incisive thoughts created the substance in the play. The audience waits for Gadot along with the actors and listens to them to fill the void in what otherwise might have been action. I remember especially feeling as though I were part of a captive audience, much like you are sitting there having to listen to me (for 20 minutes).

The second thought that flew into my mind when I considered Waiting on the Lord is the refrain of a praise song based on Isaiah 40:31 “for those that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up on wings as the eagle. They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and never faint – and the refrain goes – Help me Lord, help me Lord just to wait.”

In this passage, waiting is a time for resting, reflection, and renewal. It prepares us for the next big thing; the next assignment from God. With our strength and courage renewed, perhaps wiser from our reflection we are able to go out and function at a higher level both mentally and physically – and do more good things..

I love eagles. They are everything I want to be – strong, vigilant, appearing thoughtful and reflective, soaring high with very little exertion, and greatly feared by others both in and out of their species. Few animals mess with eagles and eagles seem to handle life’s struggles nonchalantly. Boy, that sure sounds like me! NOT! I am probably more like a crow or a pigeon bustling around requiring activity to believe I am making progress. Imagine yourself as an eagle. When you are good and ready—you lazily look around, stretch out your wings and push off ready for anything.

The great Christian writer, Oswald Chambers, author of *My Utmost for His Highest* – a devotional of startling depth – said that when we are forced into waiting, as a person of faith, it should be **in anticipation at what God will do next**; that faith is the foundation that should make us fearless for whatever happens knowing that we are in the center of God’s moving in this world and the preparation of the next world.

I read this last spring shortly after I had been laid off from a job I had taken the year before and did not particularly care for. We were then expecting the onset of the second Great Depression and I envisioned losing all that I had worked for 30 years to accumulate. I knew that I could hold out for a couple of years, but I saw all the things I thought our family needed.... and deserved-- gone and wondered if I had the energy to start over. People were getting laid off right and left, and I did not see a job at my level anywhere in the area and was not yet desperate enough to take another lesser job just to preserve the illusion of security. Like Moses, I saw myself suddenly in the wilderness (by a conversion of unfortunate events) and wondered if that was the end- my fate to simply exist until I was too old to care. I was not waiting with faith or hope. I was not an eagle using the time to renew my strength to be at my best for the next assignment. **In fact, I was wondering why God was forsaking me?**

Do you know that David waited 21 years between when Samuel anointed him King until he finally became King over both Judah and Israel? Think about that for a minute. It is almost as sad as all the years Prince Charles has waited for Queen Elizabeth to retire.

Waiting can become a lifestyle. Without a lot of thought, one can fall into a pattern of filling the hours with very small actions or distractions. We can quickly grow aimless. In my unemployment I was shocked how fast time still passed each day. Without the structure of a job and an institution to report to I found it a real challenge to use my time effectively doing the things that would have the most long-term impact. I was also profoundly uncomfortable with the free time, unable to enjoy what should have been a well-earned change of pace because I was worrying about what was happening, or NOT happening. **Waiting is NOT like being on vacation.**

But, David did not have the luxury to simply sit around those 21 years trying to amuse himself. First he loyally went to battle for the current King- Saul most often in the front lines as Saul ordered. Imagine being told you can be King only to then have to risk your life everyday. David did not shrink from the challenge. He was clear that Saul was to be obeyed, even if crazy. He truly went out fearless and full of faith seeing his service to Saul as his service to God.

Later David was ordered to hang around Saul as a courtier often given the job of cheering up the old guy that knew things were slipping away... Imagine that change of pace. He is literally fighting for his life and then suddenly he is in the King's court where little happens and everything seems so trivial.

Then, David was suddenly running for his life as Saul tried in vain to keep the throne by killing the next guy God had in line. David had a very active 21 years, but I suspect that in those years there were many hours, days, and even months where he found himself sitting around with not enough to do to distract him and was thinking about how any of this made sense given Samuel's anointing.

If you have read through the Psalms of David, you know that his mood changed like ours would have changed. At times, he was like an eagle waiting on the Lord with faith and anticipation. He poetically talked about where his HOPE was (in the Lord) and how great God was and what marvelous things he would accomplish, including vanquishing his enemies. He was in a cave somewhere, perhaps by a fire anticipating the glories that would come if he remained faithful.

We know that at other times, David shared his despair. "Will it ever change my Lord? My enemies are circled around me. I am hungry and cold. How long Lord before you start your work? David, like us went up and down – falling away in his faith and then crawling back to reach out and grab a hold of God- to cling to him through whatever was to come.....

21 years is a long time of waiting..... Waiting is hard and challenging....

Most important when you are forced to wait, is to make sure you don't screw up while you're waiting. Don't give up hope or lose your faith even as the days stretch out with no end in sight. So how do you avoid losing hope? Consider the concept of **ACTIVE WAITING**. This nugget of wisdom has come from my wife Vicki, and it is brilliant... Think about this concept.

ACTIVE WAITING.... It sounds like an oxymoron but it makes so much intuitive sense. You may be forced to wait, but that does not mean stopping. Let me get back to Oswald Chambers. In his view, waiting is a time for faith challenges and faith building. He wants each Christian to experience trials and tribulations because in his understanding of God's word, that is the only way we move forward on our personal journey to become a active part of God's team building God's kingdom.

Chambers always starts with the essential need to embrace Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior to become a child of God's. That is the most important decision that any of us makes in our lifetime. Do we believe that God sent his only son to die for our sins so that we can be reconciled to our creator and ultimately live in his presence forever? We Presbyterians are not known for calling the question, but we all need to consider this and decide for ourselves. Is Christ your savior?

If we embrace Christ we are then a child of God. We will remain a child of god, and heir to the gift of eternal life, even if we fail to make our lives all that they could be. First and foremost we must allow God to be a part of our lives.

But, Chambers in his great devotional **then turns his attention** and energy toward helping Christian believers to mature in their faith and actions. And here is where he encourages us to (as the Apostle Paul stated) rejoice in our trials and tribulations for that means that God is offering opportunities for us to grow and perfect our faith, and through that be of more use to God in this world.

ACTIVE WAITING means trudging sometimes in the fog or the dark, using all your knowledge and instincts to find the trail, never sure if you are right but trusting that you are. **ACTIVE WAITING** means living with anticipation that God is not only in charge but active in this world. If you can truly feel a sense of anticipation when you are struggling then you can feel confident that your faith is strong.... Or that you are truly delusional. Just kidding.... Seriously—if you are able to face trials and hardships with a sense that God is involved and greater things are coming—then your faith is **STRONG**.

I believe that in waiting we have to acknowledge that we are **NOT** masters of our fate and therefore not God. Without trials and waiting, we would easily be seduced into feeling as though we made our lives happen ourselves. There would be no place for God to exist. Hurts, disappointments, set-backs, physical challenges clearly remind us of the limits of our own power. They remove the illusions we manufacture that make us feel good and safe and secure. Think of those in New Orleans, a modern city in the most advanced and richest country in the world. Overnight the whims of nature in the form of Hurricane Katrina reduced those people to a primitive struggle for survival, and the rest of us watched it on TV. I don't know if you felt this way but I was shocked at how inept our public safety net was – so much so that people died in the streets from neglect. Suddenly, everything can change and move out of our personal control. In those times, we need to trust God, and in those times we learn to trust God....

Active Waiting is action- not just holding, but doing.... But, active waiting is **NOT** revenge, it leaves the hurts behind and calls us to move forward despite of what has occurred. This has some intuitive psychological benefit besides being Biblical. We can remember the admonition –“Vengeance is mine, thus says the Lord.” We also are called to forgive, even when the people we forgive do not care to be forgiven. God knows that for our own health—we cannot spare precious energy hating or planning destructive actions.

In the last few years, I have gotten tangled in a couple of political battles at work where I tried to preserve my integrity and be fair and was hurt by people who were willing to act badly to get what they wanted. I was naive and trusted that others would stand up for me at crunch time; that if I was doing what is right, I would be vindicated. At the base of this was the innate belief that life was fair and that it would all turn out in the end.

It didn't and I had the huge challenge of staving off bitterness and pity... and moving on. A person I rely on for counsel on career matters (a Christian) encouraged me to “shake the dust off my sandals” and move forward. Over time, that has also meant forgiving those that hurt me and my family even as they continue on unabated and seemingly pleased with themselves and successful.

To wait well- you have to unload the past in order to be light enough to move forward. Revenge depletes you, it fogs your mind so you cannot deal with the present. Letting go is part of the spiritual journey that is waiting.

For me, ACTIVE WAITING these last nine months has meant:

- Spending more time in prayer and reflection
- Coming to grips with how fragile my faith really is
- Working to forgive those that have hurt me
- Seeing God past simply the good things that have occurred in my life
- Trying to see God in my life even when things are hard
- Working everyday to make that day count in a more eternal sense

There is one more element of waiting that must be considered, and that I have been learning about these last several months. God gives us what we NEED, not always what we WANT.

What we want is what we know, what we are comfortable with. What we need is often unknown to us, especially when our daily goals are not aligning with Gods goals for us. We often figure out what we need after we receive it. It is only in reflection on what has occurred that we can see God's handiwork.

When each of us prays, if you are like me, we move from the adoration and forgiveness phases pretty quickly to the request phase of prayer. God, please make this happen; save this person; do that.... We are pretty sure we know what we want and of course God must want that too.

My current career uncertainty is definitely NOT what I want, but in so many ways, it is what I need. I do not declare this yet with joy and excitement as a great person of faith might do. But, I am accepting that this might be the case—that I have this opportunity to grow spiritually and spend more time with my family, and perhaps start something new and much more useful because I am currently unencumbered somewhat. Maybe God knows this is what I need, even though it was definitely not what I wanted.

Conclusion:

We are all waiting on the Lord. We are waiting for the fullness of things yet unseen – in our daily lives and in the great course of human history. How we wait makes all the difference in how we prevail.

As believers, we are encouraged to wait with anticipation- God is moving and we must be watchful if we want to see Him in action.

We must be active in our waiting. Don't squander your time in self pity or confusion. Each day pray and move forward in faith. In reality, no one knows what tomorrow will hold.

Don't spend your precious resources trapped in anger, resentment, or hatred. Invest in activities that will make a positive difference in you and in others.

Seek what you need, not what you want. Oswald Chambers says over and over again that our vision is so small compared to that of our creator and Lord. Seek ye first, the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to it.