

Sermon May 12

Passage Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

I am usually a patient person. Growing up in a culture where queuing was commonplace, and woe behold anyone who attempted to skip that queue or line taught patience. However, there are times I do get impatient. For example, I find it hard to wait if there is a delay at the airport to board a plane or for traffic lights to change. I dislike being stuck on the Beltway. How hard it is to wait at times! *Waiting can be hard.*

Biblically, waiting is an active verb

Waiting is core in our reading from Acts today. Having been witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, having been told by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem for the "promise of the Father," (Acts 1:4), they are gathered together in one house, devoting themselves to prayer, waiting for that promise to be fulfilled. We read On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The future is uncertain. With His Ascension Jesus is no longer with them in the flesh, but they wait and hope and trust.

imagine how hard it was for Jesus' disciples after he ascended into heaven. Jesus had given them one final instruction: "Wait until you are clothed with power from on high." But how long would that

be? We can hear the disciples saying “Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us”.

So as they wait Peter gives the group a task to complete. That task was to fill the position left empty by Judas. A person to complete the circle of leadership so to speak. The twelve who followed Jesus throughout his life are now eleven who remained faithful.

The eleven are not alone. There is a community, numbering “about one hundred twenty persons” (1:15) small but strong; it is faithful but apparently incomplete.

These verses are setting the stage for the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus through reestablishing the integrity of the body of disciples and it also helps cement Peter’s leadership role as he stood up among the believers. He makes an important statement “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus-- for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. This statement I suggest was like a point of closure. It was a turning point, a time to move on which involved a waiting period. This waiting period was a time to reflect, to trust, but also to discern

But how to choose a twelfth disciple? Peter determines that Judas’ replacement would come from that small group of believers who had been witnesses, of the earliest days of Jesus’ ministry as well as his resurrection. Two individuals are put forth as qualified: Joseph and Matthias.

How would we have discerned which of the two to be Judas’ replacement? Would we have asked for a speech from these two candidates and then taken a vote, perhaps a debate? In contrast, this

early congregation turns to prayer and the casting of lots. To us, casting lots (the ancient version of picking a name out of a hat) would have left this important decision to chance or fate. But for ancient Jews, this was a way to ensure that God would have the ultimate choice! Beyond human control, the casting of lots left the decision completely up to God.

With God's choice made, the eleven are now twelve. This growing body of believers is now ready to receive God's precious, promised gift of the Spirit. But they must wait, hope, and trust.

So how does their experience speak to us today in Resurrection in the wider church, our own lives as we move towards Pentecost? This episode from the early church reminds us that there are times when we all need to wait. It may be hard to stop moving, but obeying the command to "wait" allow God the opportunity to accomplish great things among us. It can offer us time to reflect, to discern to trust.

No one likes to wait. But we wait in traffic, in grocery stores, for the doctor, for a spouse, for a baby, for retirement, for sermons to get over, or for Jesus to return.

Waiting is not just something we have to do while we get what we want. Waiting is the process of becoming what God wants us to be. What God does in us while we wait is as important as what it is we are waiting for. Waiting, biblical waiting, is not a passive waiting around for something to happen that will allow us to escape our troubles. Waiting does not mean doing nothing. It is not fatalistic resignation. It is not a way to evade unpleasant reality.

Those who wait are those who work, because they know their work is not in vain. Those who wait on God can go about their assigned tasks, confident that God will provide the meaning and conclusions to their lives and the harvest to their toil. Waiting is the confident, disciplined,

expectant, active, and sometimes painful clinging to God. It knows that we will reap a reward.

When Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, he was telling them that this was a means of experiencing discernment, his peace, his prosperity, his power. In waiting they would catch the wind of God's Spirit. In waiting they would see God move. God wants us to know that waiting is far from a passive activity in which we do nothing. Waiting strategically can cultivate good fruit in our lives. The psalmist tells us **They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither; *everything they do shall prosper.**

Let us pray

Holy Lord, you hold all our times in your powerful hands. Help us to see when it may be time for us to wait—and grant us the patient faith to do so and in doing so recognize the Spirit at work. Amen.