

Wait, Wait, Now Go

Acts 2:1-21

Introduction

The story is told about a man who went shopping with his wife one day. They had just purchased a piece of luggage and a cooler, so as husbands sometimes do, he was carrying those items while his wife continued to shop.

- He was casually browsing through the shoe department when one of the clerks asked if she could be of any assistance.
- "Oh, no, thank you," he replied. "I'm just waiting for my wife to finish her shopping."
- At that point, a man standing nearby said, "I'm waiting for my wife, too, but it never occurred to me to bring a lunch and an overnight bag."

Waiting is one of our least favorite things to do, isn't it?

- I don't mind relaxing or wasting time. Right?
- But waiting is hard!

That's why Scripture verses like these are challenges for me in my own faith walk:

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him ... (Lamentations 3:25)

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength... (Isaiah 40:31)

Last Sunday we celebrated the Ascension of our Lord – the day when Jesus left earth and went back into heaven. We celebrate the ascension 40 days after the resurrection, so the actual date on the church calendar would have been Thursday, May 14, but we celebrate it on Sunday.

- In two of the lectionary readings last week, we saw words that could be summarized like this:

Go back to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come.

- Luke 24:49 said: "...remain in the city [Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49)
- And Acts 1:4 said it like this: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (Acts 1:4)

This would be no ordinary "waiting."

- It wasn't the impatient kind of waiting you do while you are standing in the "12 items or less" line while someone with a full shopping cart fumbles with expired coupons.
- It wasn't the stressful kind of waiting you do while waiting for the results of your medical testing.
- Nor was it wasn't the bored kind of waiting you do while you while sitting in your car waiting for the rest of the family to stop talking and come outside.

- This was a waiting of expectancy. God was going to do something, and they were convinced that it would be something special.

Our reading from Acts 2 today records what happened when the time of waiting was over. The text begins with these words:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. (Acts 1:1-2)

That event is what we celebrate today ... on this Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost – 50 days from the resurrection. This is the day we call the “birthday of the church” because on this day the waiting was done and the ministry began.

I've been thinking about the cluster of verses that I shared earlier, about how Jesus told His disciples to wait for (what turns out to be) 10 days. Why did He make them wait? Why did He choose to wait for 10 days to give them something (the Holy Spirit) that presumably He could have given them right away? What difference did the waiting make? In those 10 days several things happened ... things that needed time to bring about.

#1: GOD CREATED UNITY AMONG THE DISCIPLES

Notice verse 1:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

I like how the King James puts this verse:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all in one accord in one place. (Acts 2:1, KJV)

Throughout the three years of Jesus' ministry, these disciples were constantly bickering with one another, competing for places of honor, displaying bits of jealousy and the need to outdo one another in their expressions of passion and support.

- Just 50 days prior to this event, these same disciples had been meeting together – all, that is, except for Thomas. And now, not only were the Twelve together in one place, they were also together in one heart.
- At the end of the previous chapter, they were in full agreement about the process for selecting a disciple to replace Judas
- Throughout the verses since the Ascension, no one objected to Peter taking the primary leadership role – not even James and John who had, as you may recall, tried to negotiate the prime positions of honor in the new kingdom they thought Jesus was trying to establish.
- And then, by the time Acts 15 happens, Peter will turn over that leadership role to James anyway.

The greatest miracle of Pentecost may not be the arrival of the Holy Spirit. It might be that these disciples were getting along!

- We all know of – and some of us have personally experienced – dysfunctional Christian organizations and churches. It is hard for the Spirit of God to do anything where dysfunction reigns.
- But as they waited for Him to do what He had promised, God created unity in their midst.

That unity was going to be essential as they tried to fulfill their mission, for in a few short months they were going to become the focus of great persecution.

- And where there are fractures, persecution will create division. And where there is division, things die.
- Before the Spirit could come, there needed to be unity among the believers.
- Never underestimate the importance of maintaining unity in the Body of Christ! In those 10 days ...

STATEMENT #2: GOD GREW THE FAITH OF THE DISCIPLES

These disciples – the 12 and all the others in that room – were different people when the Spirit arrived. I see it in one group contrast and in one individual life as well.

- The Group: On Easter Sunday night, remember where these disciples were?

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" (John 19:20)

As they left the site of the Ascension, they are described much differently:

Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. (Luke 24:52-53)

And in a matter of moments, these once-fearful disciples would stand before thousands of fellow Jews and proclaim the good news of Jesus.

- The Individual: No individual better personifies the newly grown faith than does Peter. He is the one who cowered around a campfire when a little servant girl asked:

"Aren't you one of His disciples?" (John 18:25)

And yet in today's reading this same cowardly man would preach the church's first sermon and in it (in verses not a part of today's reading), he would point the accusatory finger at the crowd and say:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. (Acts 2:36)

When the Spirit of God blows, it always blows on people of faith, giving them the power to do the unthinkable and the unimaginable. In those 10 days ...

#3: GOD GAVE THEM A STORY TO TELL

And did they tell it!

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:4)

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)

They told it everywhere they went, to everyone they met. Their passion about telling their story was contagious – and threatening to the Jewish leaders, who on more than one occasion told them to shut up, prompting the disciples to reply: Peter and the other apostles replied:

"We must obey God rather than human beings! (Acts 5:29)

Their reputation spread too, so much so that in the city of Thessalonica they were described like this:

These (men) who have turned the world upside down... (Acts 17:6)

During those 10 days of waiting, those gathered in that meeting place talked about all they had seen and heard when they walked with Jesus:

- Remember that story about the seeds that were sown, and how we didn't understand it? I get it now!
- Remember when He raised that dead boy back to life?
- Remember how He walked on the water? And how Peter sank?!!! When the Spirit of God touches a life, that person has a story to tell!

APPLICATION

There are two take-aways from this message today.

The first is that God is always at work whenever you have to wait. God is doing something to shape you, mold you, teach you, transform you. Something.

- If you are in a waiting period right now – for whatever reason – believe this:

God is at work while you wait.

The second take-away is this: the Spirit has already come!

- For purposes of the mission of the church, the time of waiting is over. We have all we need in order to fulfill the commission God has given us.
- So now it is time to tell the story to anyone who will listen.

There is an old hymn with these lyrics. The title is “The Comforter Has Come”

Oh, spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found,
Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;
Let every Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound:
The Comforter has come!

Happy birthday church! Oh, spread the tidings 'round, wherever man is found— The Comforter has come!

Amen.