

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 14, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SIXTH SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Come to be refreshed and revived by our worship of God.
All: **We come seeking guidance. We come seeking comfort.**
One: Come to listen and hear God's word to us.
All: **We take time out from our busy schedules to be still and know that the Lord is God.**
Unison: **So come, let us worship the Lord our God. For God is here!**

***OPENING HYMN** "God Is Here!" GtG 409 (*Verses 1, 2, & 4*)

1. **God is here! As we your people
meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure
what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit
into open minds and hearts.**
2. **Here are symbols to remind us
of our lifelong need of grace;
here are table, font, and pulpit;
here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
here in silence, as in speech,
here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each.**

(continued...)

4. **Lord of all, of church and kingdom,
in an age of change and doubt
keep us faithful to the gospel;
help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
all we have to give, receive:
we, who cannot live without you,
we adore you! We believe!**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Gracious God: we are busy about many things, then we fail to take time to
heed your presence. We do not listen for your word or watch for your lead. We
rush headlong into projects, forgetting to consider your will. Forgive our hastiness,
O Lord. Slow us down long enough to perceive your direction for us and to hear
your word to us. Help us to watch and wait for the leading of your Spirit in our
lives. For we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: God's power to pardon is immeasurable.

All: **The Lord hears our confession and is eager to forgive.**

One: Forgiveness is God's gift to us,

All: **one we can never earn but are welcome to accept.**

One: Proclaim this good news to the ends of the earth: believe it, live it.

All: **Through the mercy of Christ, our sins
are forgiven. Thanks be to God!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

*(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod
of the head, etc.)*

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Isaiah 40:27-31

Acts 1:1-14

ISAIAH 40:27-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?
²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
The Lord does not faint or grow weary;
God's understanding is unsearchable.
²⁹ God gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
³¹ but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

ACTS 1:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by the Father's own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the

Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “The Power of Waiting...Waiting...Waiting...” by Pastor Bill Vincent

How many times have we heard it? "But I can't wait!"

How many moms have heard that?

Now for the moment of truth: how many moms have said that?

Trust me...and dads, too.

Words of exasperation that are heard not only from the lips of children and youth, but adults as well.

“I can't wait for this child to arrive!”

“I can't wait for this line to move!”

“I can't wait till Christmas!”

“I can't wait for the doctor to see me.”

“I can't wait for this wait to be over!”

Waiting is one of the hardest things to do in life. We are an active people (and impatient), and we are a people who want things Now! Waiting tends to be against our nature.

I sit in front of the computer, and all I see is this blue circle going round and round and round, over and over and over. Grrr! It's so frustrating!

With waiting there often comes a feeling of helplessness – there's nothing we can do. We don't like it; we fret over it; we get frustrated with it; we gnaw at the bit; we rebel against it – and it drains us of energy.

A sad contrast to the picture in our passage from Isaiah:

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

Yes, waiting is indeed hard to do.

Yet waiting is an integral part of life.

In most languages, the majority of verbs fall into two categories: Active – I do something – and Passive – something happens to me.

I jump. I am jumped.

I drive. I am driven.

I teach. I am taught.

Verbs reflect life.

Some things in life we can go after, can grasp, can do and make for ourselves – active verbs of life. Other things we can only wait for, can only happen to us, be done for us – passive verbs of life. We can work for a living; we can only wait for the weekend. We can work at planting; we can only wait for the seed to take root, the plant to grow, the flower to blossom, the

fruit to ripen. We can go out and love others, doing unto them as we would have them do unto us; we can only receive their love in return – we can't grab for it, but must wait until it is given by others.

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

The first step in making waiting something positive – something through which we will receive strength and power – is to accept waiting as a part of life. If we rebel against it, we will waste ourselves, drain ourselves of energy. If we accept it, it becomes a vessel through which our strength is renewed, through which we will receive power, and be renewed, revived, refreshed.

As William Barclay notes,

We would gain more power and courage and peace if we learned to wait. In the business – and busy-ness? – of life we need to learn to be still. ... Amidst life's surging activity there must be time to receive. (*The Acts of the Apostles*, William Barclay, p.11)

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

Now I realize that waiting may be easier for some than for others.

For those for whom waiting is easy, there's a danger of not acting when the time comes to act, and doing so at the risk of ignoring God.

Those for whom waiting is hard may need to learn to turn their attention to other things that can be done in the meantime, biding their time till the waiting is over.

But also note: not all waiting is necessary, or helpful.

Sometimes we can be lulled – or frustrated – into inactivity, into doing nothing. We let the situation worsen, we let the evil fester, and we wait ... when we shouldn't. We wait when we should be going out and doing: doing justice, fighting evil, engaging in kind and loving acts.

So perhaps we don't do because don't want to do: our taxes, our homework; we don't want to make 'that' call, or that doctor's appointment.

Ecclesiastes reminds us, "*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven*" (3:1). To rebel against waiting, when it is God's will, is to rebel against God. But in the same vein, to wait when we shouldn't – to be lulled (or beaten) into inactivity when God is calling us to be active – this too is to rebel against God.

There are some important things we can do while we are waiting (that might also help us discern when it is appropriate to wait, and when it is not).

Such as the apostles' devoting themselves to prayer: the prime example of the need to wait and the power of waiting.

William Willimon comments:

The response of the disciples...is exemplary. They gather to pray (1:12-14). In an activist age one might expect the disciples to undertake some more "useful" activity. They are told to be witnesses "to the end of the earth"

(1:8), and their first response is prayer. The action demanded of the church is more than busyness and strenuous human effort. ... Our waiting implies that the things which need doing in the world are beyond our ability to accomplish solely by our own effort, our programs and crusades. Some other empowerment is needed, therefore the church waits and prays. (William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation series, p.21)

It reminds us of the need for prayerful response to the perplexities, the experiences, and the necessary waiting of life.

A prayerful response, attentive to God's leading.

And there are important things that happen while we are waiting – or can happen, if we will let them.

As we wait, we can rest and recuperate. Think of it as a prescribed R&R. We reorient ourselves, sharpen our perspective, gain new knowledge, learn new skills, receive strength and power from God that we will need next time we are called upon to act.

Like the waiting needed to heal after an illness or surgery. "I don't have time to be sick!" Sorry! You need to take the time anyway.

Or like the waiting needed to recuperate after a strenuous workout...out in the garden.

But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

Strength and power that is nothing less than a gift from God. So we can only wait.

But sometimes the importance of waiting has nothing to do with things happening or doing things, but simply learning to be. Being in the moment: being here, now, instead of somewhere else or somewhen else. Simply being.

For the danger for us is to be so wrapped up in 'happening' and 'doing' that we are too busy to be here and now in order to hear God's still small voice of guidance; we are too hectic, busy, frenetic to see God pointing us in the right direction.

For crucial to our waiting is a sense of rhythm: waiting for the time when God acts and calls us to join in.

We wait for God to act, for the appropriate time when God calls us to take action.

The disciples could sense they were on the brink, on the verge of something. An anticipatory pause, a prayerful pause. The pregnant pause, the hold-your-breath moment before the starting gun at the Kentucky Derby, or the Indianapolis 500. The position of the disciples as Jesus left and told them to wait in Jerusalem. But they had to wait and see what it was.

And Pentecost illustrates obedient waiting well-rewarded.

Now, not all our waiting is, or appears to be, so exciting, so "on the verge" of something. But maybe that is the stance called for in our waiting.

Henry Sloan Coffin reminds us,

Waiting for the Lord provided [the people of Israel]...with the mentality which made [them]...pre-eminently "the waiting community." The early

church was possessed by the same mentality, which unhappily has ceased to be the mind of contemporary Christians. We are not looking hopefully for God's arrivals on the scene in gracious power in historic happenings. Yet it is to this waiting mentality that increases of strength are promised.

(Interpreter's Bible, vol.5, p.446)

We need to cultivate an attitude of hopeful waiting, on the lookout for what God is doing next and calling us to do and be. Being attuned to God's pace and rhythm.

Like in music. Sometimes you sing or play your instrument. But sometimes you perform a silent note called a rest when you neither play nor sing, but instead you patiently and alertly wait for the next time that you do play or sing. And it takes discipline to avoid coming in too early or too late, and to know when to come in at the right moment. And part of that discipline for us is the discipline of prayer. But note: it is only in waiting, being attentive, and acting appropriately, that wonderful music is made.

Ross MacKenzie affirms,

Waiting is not always a bad thing. At times in the life of the church the best thing to do is to sit still.... *(The Word in Action: The Acts of the Apostles for Our Time, Ross MacKenzie, p.14)*

Maintain a prayerful, expectant pause, anticipating God's action in our midst, God's leading in our lives.

So the Psalmist reminds us:

*Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain. (127:1)*

All our anxiety, all our work, effort, toil will be for nothing...unless we are working together with God: discerning God's will and perceiving God's action in our midst, and waiting for the right time to act.

It will come. But in God's time, not ours.

So Jesus said to the disciples: Go to Jerusalem and wait until the appropriate time. Wait for God's time.

Waiting. It is most certainly one of the hardest things we are called upon to do.

But our waiting can be beneficial to us, to strengthen and prepare us for those times and places when we are called to join with God in acting and doing for the good of the world.

So let us be a prayerful people, awaiting God's direction, alert and attentive to when and where God would have us act.

For if we will – if we will wait with patience and trust, wait in hope and in prayer – we will come to discover the power of waiting... waiting... waiting.....

***HYMN “Take Time to Be Holy”**

- 1. Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
abide in him always and feed on his word.
Make friends of God’s children; help those who are weak;
forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.**

- 2. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like him thou shalt be;
thy friends in thy conduct his likeness shall see.**

- 3. Take time to be holy, let him be thy guide,
and run not before him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
and, looking to Jesus, still trust in his word.**

- 4. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul --
each thought and each motive beneath his control.
Thus led by his Spirit to fountains of love,
thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.**

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Music: LONGSTAFF/HOLINESS, George C. Stebbins,
1890. *Public Domain.*

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.**

(continued...)

**Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: ...through Jesus Christ our Lord.
All: ...Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Contemporary)*

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

We praise your name, O God, for you are merciful and gracious toward us. Thank you for faith and love, for knowledge and wisdom, for all the seasons of life that present us with opportunities for growth and fulfillment. Create in us hearts of gratitude willing to wait for you and wait in you. May our gifts share the Good News of the gospel to those who are in need and help unburden those with the heaviest of loads, as we seek to love and serve you in our doing and in our waiting. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Open My Eyes, That I May See” GtG 451

- 1. Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes; illumine me, Spirit divine!**

- 2. Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear.
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears; illumine me, Spirit divine!**

- 3. Open my mouth, and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere.
Open my heart, and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart; illumine me, Spirit divine!**

Words: Clara H. Scott, 1895. *Public Domain.*

Music: OPEN MY EYES, Clara H. Scott, 1895. *Public Domain.*

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...**Amen.**

POSTLUDE

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