

Sermons at St. Luke's

A sermon preached by The Rev. Joseph Hensley, Jr. on Sunday, June 17, 2011.

Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Let's hear again these words from Paul's letter to the Romans. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." "The creation waits - the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed," about to be - not yet - creation waits and waits and waits for God to fulfill God's purposes, to heal, to set free. It's going to happen, but not yet. You got to wait. What are we waiting for?

Today's scriptures are filled with examples of waiting. People waiting - Jacob. In the lesson from Genesis, Jacob is waiting to see will God actually fulfill the promise that God made to Jacob's grandfather, Abraham, that their descendents would number as the dust of the earth? Jacob's also waiting to see if his brother Esau is going to come and kill him. He's on the first leg of a long journey that will take him far from home as he flees his brother from whom he has stolen a birthright and a blessing. And so Jacob is waiting to see how his life will unfold.

In the Gospel lesson from Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about a farmer who plants wheat and an enemy who plants weeds, and the farmer tells the hired hands, "Wait, don't go weeding my garden just yet. Let the weeds grow up alongside of the wheat. Wait until the harvest, then the weeds will be gone." In Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul assures the believers in Rome that God will redeem the whole creation, that God will set us free from our bondage to sin, to our slavery to decay and death, from our futility, but not yet. You got to wait with eager longing, wait with patient persistence and endurance like a woman in labor hoping that the baby will come soon.

You got to wait. God's made some promises, but you got to wait. What are we waiting for? What are we waiting for? Are we, like Jacob, waiting for a promise to be fulfilled, or are we waiting for something from our past to come and get us perhaps? Are we waiting to see how our life will unfold? How things will turn out for us? Are we, like the hired hands in the field, waiting to go in there and get those weeds out? You know, that parable for me it reminds me that there are parts of us that are like the wheat and there are parts of us that are like the weeds, and there are times when we just want to get there in and have an angel of God come and rip out my impatience, rip out the parts of me that I don't like, rip out the parts of me that distract me from God and from love of neighbor and love of self. But God says, "Nope, you got to wait, let the good parts grow alongside the parts sown by the evil one." And don't worry, there will come a time when those weeds will be gone, but for now, we have to wait.

Are we like the believers in Rome waiting for justice, waiting for an end to oppression, waiting for a time in which our world is not dominated by the power of greed and selfishness? Are we waiting for a time when the evils of racism and environmental destruction, homophobia, classicism, sexism - and the list goes on and on - are we waiting with eager longing for those things to come to an end, for the revealing of the children of God? What are we waiting for? Maybe it's a little closer to home. Maybe we're just waiting for someone to call and say that they

got home safely. Or we're waiting for that call from the doctor about a diagnosis. We're waiting to see if the medicine we took is going to kick in and the pain will go away, or to see if the pain will get worse. We're waiting, waiting.

My family and I have been through a particularly intense time of waiting these last few months. As many of you know, my wife's pregnant and our unborn son has a condition called spina bifida, an opening in the spine, and we went to Philadelphia for a month while we had a surgery on him while he was in the womb. And we experienced the whole range of waiting, from the annoying waiting that comes at just waiting for a parking space at the hospital parking deck to the waiting for the surgery to be over and waiting for that news that all had gone well, to being in the hospital and being so aware that I had access to the best doctors in the world and waiting for that time when all people might have access to health care and to healing. Waiting, waiting, waiting.

But we also experience another kind of waiting, my family and I, that I haven't mentioned yet, and that is a joyful kind of waiting. As we wait for this new child to come, we are excited and expectant, eagerly longing for this new life to become a part of our lives. And there are times when we wait with such expectancy, we wait for a family friend to come and visit that we haven't seen in a long time. We wait for a birthday. You kids out there, you know how it is to wait for your birthday or wait for Christmas morning. And you're waiting and you're like, "I can't wait for it to get here. It's going to be here so soon."

And that's the time we actually get into the waiting, don't we? We get into it. We put up decorations and we plan things, we polish silver, we make food. It's not like that waiting in the grocery aisle. And you all know how it is in the grocery aisle. Has anybody ever played that game where you watch someone a few aisles over getting into their aisle at the same time you're getting into your aisle and you're sort of saying to yourself, "Now, which one of us is going to get out of here first?" And you're watching them. Anything we can do to pass the time to make the waiting a little bit more bearable. But no, no, but there's a joyful kind of waiting, an expectant kind of waiting that's not like that where we actually get into it, and that's the kind of waiting that St. Paul invites to be a part of when he's talking about that eager longing, that patience that is not just sitting there passing the time, but is actively and persistently hoping, hoping for the time when God will reveal the children of God.

I wish I could say that the experience that I've had over the last few months of all the waiting has made me a better wait-er. I'm still working on that. But I'm encouraged by the lessons today that offer the promise that the waiting is filled with God. That God is with us in our waiting. When Jacob was waiting on that journey, God says in the dream, "I am with you." Not "I will be with you," but "I am now here in your time of uncertainty and waiting with you and will keep you wherever you go."

God is with us in the waiting. As we wait for the weeds of ourselves to be gone, God is waiting with us, saying to us, "I will not let you be uprooted. I will not let the Godly, goodly parts of yourselves be uprooted." As we wait for justice, as we wait for goodness to triumph, Paul reminds us that all who are led by the Spirit are children of God, that God has called us to be a part of God's family in our waiting. And as our preacher Stuart Hoke reminded us last week,

nothing can separate us from the love of God. God waits with us. As that Psalm 139 says, God knows our sitting down and our rising up. "Where can I go then from your Spirit?" the Psalmist asks. "Where can I flee from your presence? If I climb up to heaven, you are there. If I make the grave my bed, you are there also." God is with us in heaven, on earth, in the dark and in the light, in the weeds or in the womb, God waits with us.

And so the question I want to ask is, why do we spend so much time trying to distract ourselves in the midst of waiting? When God is in the waiting room, why do we try and find other things to occupy ourselves? Going back to that example of being in the line at the grocery store and we play these games to try and get through that time, but I wonder, what if we, instead of watching the person five aisles over or getting lost in the headlines of People Magazine, what if we looked at each item that we put into our cart and we said thank you, thank you for this food, thank you that I'm able to eat, and I'm able to wait for that time when I'm going to take this food and make it into a meal and maybe share it with somebody that I love, waiting for the time when all God's children will have food to eat, waiting for the time when the food can be grown in a way that sustains the earth instead of destroying it, and we turn our tedious times of waiting into times of hopeful, expectant, persistently patient waiting for the revealing of the children of God.

How many of you know about the game Angry Birds? It's a game that you can play on some of these fancy phones that people have. I have not played it myself, although some members of my family enjoy playing it. I won't be able to describe it very well. In the game, there's these birds flying and they're sort of fighting against these pigs and there's eggs involved - and anyway, but it's a way to pass the time. It's a way to get through some more tedious moments. But what if instead of or maybe after our one game or two or ten games of Angry Birds we considered the birds of the air as Jesus says earlier in Matthew. "How the birds of the air, they neither toil nor spin nor gather into barns, and yet the Lord, the God in heaven feeds them." And God will feed us in our waiting, in our longing. God will feed us when we open ourselves to receive.

Hear again those words of St. Paul, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." God never said we wouldn't have to wait, but God promises to be with us in our waiting saying, "I am with you and will keep you wherever you wait, wherever you go."