

5-23 (Pentecost) What Are We Waiting For? Acts 1:1-5; 2:16-21; Gal 4:4-7

Very early on, I learned that there were **two kinds of waiting**. I learned the first kind when I eagerly waited for Christmas morning. This is the kind of waiting that makes the hope and joy all the more striking.

The other kind of waiting I also learned early on. This kind of waiting drained joy and hope out of life. It led to growing dread. This waiting was pure torture. I'm talking about waiting for my dad to get home; or waiting for that report card to come out with great grades but something less than an S in department; or waiting in the doctor's office for that needle.

I'll take that excited kind of waiting every time. This is the kind those apostles and disciples felt after Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit.

To help you find Pentecost on a timeline, Jesus was crucified during Passover which is 50 days before Pentecost. Scripture tells us that Jesus showed himself to his disciples for 40 days and then was taken away to sit at the right hand of God. Ten days after this ascension, as it's called, came the festival of Pentecost, or in Hebrew, *Shavuot*.

Shavuot, or the Festival of Weeks, was one of three pilgrimage festivals in Judaism. It occurred when grain was being harvested. It's real purpose, however, was to keep the memory of God giving the Torah or Law to Moses and the Hebrews at Sinai.

We know that Torah means Law but likely comes from a root that means guide or direction. Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit would guide them into all truth, hence the correlation between the Jewish Shavuot and the Christian Pentecost.

One of the questions asked of Scripture about Pentecost cannot be easily answered. That question is, **Who was actually gathered when the Spirit was given and who spoke in languages other than their own; was it the 12 apostles or also many others such as the 120 mentioned when Mathias was chosen to replace Judas?** For you folks that like to study, read Acts 1 and 2 with that question in mind and see if you can come to a clear answer.

Before this outpouring of the Spirit, apostles and disciples were waiting as they had been told. That wait lasted 10 days; not at home; in Jerusalem. I guess I'm wondering if any of us could have waited 10 days. Some of us get impatient when we have to wait 10 minutes in line. We go stir crazy when the snow keeps us in for two days.

During those 10 days, did the apostles and disciples wait with eager expectation or were they nervous about the unknown? I took my girls to Carowinds where we waited in lines for 5 hours and rode rides that lasted a total of 15 minutes. It was with eager anticipation that we waited in line for the newest rollercoaster, the *Intimidator*, which is supposed to be the tallest and fastest coaster in the Southeast. I can tell you that climbing the first hill with the clink, clink, clink of the chain turns excitement toward fear of the unknown. But that wait was only 30 seconds or so.

What did those disciples do with ten days of waiting? They didn't watch TV or Twitter. They did not go to six flags over Jerusalem. You can really kill some time in a committee meeting but they had yet to discover that joy. They did choose a 12th apostle to take the place of Judas.

This story shows that there are actually **two more ways to wait**. Not only do we wait eagerly or dreadfully, we either **wait in motion or we wait in stillness**. Electing Mathias was motion; gathering together was motion. But there must have been lots of pacing and daydreaming too.

I've served with people who thought the church should move out in ministry when a new idea comes up. In this view, one need not wait and wait for some sign of the Spirit because the

sign is that the need was discovered and the idea was given. These folks literally practice **ready, fire, aim**, but it's not as silly as it sounds because they believe that the Spirit steers those who are moving better than those who are sitting still.

I've served with others who wanted to make sure they were doing the right thing before they took a step. They wanted to wait for some sense or sign as they prayed and planned to think about every detail. They don't wait for a Pentecost experience, but they wait for a very clear sense of God's will before they move forward.

Both could be right or wrong depending on other factors. I usually favor moving, but try to be open to those who are more cautious.

So that's four ways to wait; with excitement or dread; actively or passively. But there are two more in this story. One stands out throughout the Bible. If you look up the term *waiting* in your concordance you will see that most references have to do with us waiting for God; waiting for God's mercy; God's deliverance; God's blessing...

Noah and his family waited for God to recede the waters. Moses waited on God to guide and feed the people. Isaiah prophesied that those who wait or hope in the Lord will *renew their strength; will mount up with wings as eagles; will run and not grow weary and will walk and not faint*.

Then there are references about those who would not wait for God. The people would not wait for Moses to come down from the mountain, so they threw themselves a party for an Egyptian god. Judas could not wait for Jesus to be the Messiah who would throw off Roman tyranny.

We do wait on God whether we like it or not. But there is yet another kind of waiting in Scripture. It is waiting by God. God also waits for us and for the best time.

We've heard it in one of our texts today: *in the fullness of time, God sent his son*. Jesus wasn't born into the world of the First Century by accident. Jesus came when all the stars were aligned and all the pieces were in place. God waited 600 to 1000 years from the time Joel said that God would pour out the Spirit on all flesh. God waits. God will not be goaded or pressured out of divine time.

I've wondered if this waiting might be difficult for God too. It is natural for the suffering to imagine God as insulated or unfeeling of our pain. We think God could do something about it. But the Bible pictures God as merciful; wanting to redeem all creation. Paul tells us that all creation is groaning as it waits redemption. God is groaning too. God is broken by our suffering, even that which comes by our own hands. God wants to wipe away every tear from our eyes NOW. I don't like it but now is not the right time.

Why did God wait for Pentecost to pour out the Spirit? Probably because there would be tens of thousands of Jews and God-fearers from many nations gathered in Jerusalem for the festival. If you want to speak to people of every language, what better time?

But timing is not all God waits for. **Sometimes, God waits for us**. God waits for us to take a step or to pray or to repent or to be open. God waited for **Abram** to lift that knife to kill his son before he stayed his hand. God waited until the **priests** carrying the ark set foot in the Jordan River before the waters parted. God waited for **Naaman** to dip himself in the Jordan River 7 times before he was healed of leprosy. God said through his prophet **Malachi**, *Give me a tenth of what you earn and I will open the floodgates of blessing*. Jesus put mud on the eyes of the **blind man** and told him to go wash it off, and he was healed. God can act at any time, but often waits for us.

You've heard the story of the Christian who kept praying that he could win the lottery so that he could help build a new church building. Every day he prayed continuously and he really was going to give the money to his church. Finally, after months of praying, God spoke to him in a dream, saying, *I'd love for you to win the lottery so that the money could be used for building, but it would really help me out if you bought a ticket.* God often waits for our step.

We have a member here who went to Wake Forest with 2 dollars in his pocket and no confirmed income. That is a remarkable step of faith and God did indeed provide what was needed for Mr. Williams' education. There are many such stories in this room. God waited for some step of faith on your part and then gave the gift.

Our congregation has experience with God waiting for us. 17 times, this church started another congregation in some underserved part of Guilford County. It was after the commitment and the start that God blessed these steps of faith. These churches have reached thousands beyond our doors. God waited for our initiative.

What is God waiting for us to do; and what step of faith must we take before God pours out the Spirit upon us? There may be someone here who wants to be a follower of Jesus but so far it's been an inward search. Why not take a step of faith today and share your commitment to Christ with this congregation.

Some of you see that your brothers and sisters are finding meaningful service for Christ in their lives and you feel drawn toward discovering your gift and your calling. What is God waiting for in you? Maybe God's waiting for you to express your desire to those who will pray for and encourage you. Maybe God wants you to jump into service as a way to find what doesn't fit and eventually what does. Yes, pray, but put some feet to those prayers and take a step. It might be the one God's waiting for.

What is God waiting for First Baptist to do? We have taken many missional steps of faith. SS classes have worked together to meet so many different needs. Ministry teams have been formed as instruments in God's hands and God has blessed us. As a second step toward our Vision priorities, we will soon be taking some steps to help us reach young adults and families. We'll know soon if God has been waiting for these steps because if that's the case, God will pour out power and blessing upon us.