

John 11:1-45  
April 2, 2017

There are many questions with this passage. Primarily, why did Jesus wait 2 days prior to setting out on his journey in response to Martha and Mary's request to come be with their brother Lazarus? By the time he arrived, Lazarus was dead and had been in the tomb for 4 days? Our text tells us this was so that God's glory might be revealed through Jesus' final sign in John's gospel. The greatest sign. To raise Lazarus from the dead. A foreshadowing of the ultimate glory of God on the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter morning.

We are nearing the completion of Lent. A season of waiting. A season of longing. I am not sure about you but I am ready to get to Easter morning. The glorious hymns we love to sing. The fragrant aroma of lilies which will adorn our space reminding us of the new life we have through Christ's resurrection. This is and Christmas are without a doubt the most glorious days in the church year. Can't we just jump to that and bypass the agony of the cross. The cries of Jesus. The desertion of the disciples. The ugliness of death. The weeping of the women.

Waiting is challenging yet the Bible runs amuck with periods of waiting. Waiting for God to act. Jonah was in the belly of the whale for 3 days and 3 nights. The people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years prior to entering the Promised Land. Noah sailed upon the stormy seas of the great flood for 40 days and 40 nights before God sent a dove to reveal dry land and new life and prior to as he constructed the flood he waited for years for the rain to fall. Imagine the stares of the people. The questions they must have asked him. The disbelief. They must have thought he was insane and how easy would it have been for Noah to give up. When was God going to act? Yet, Noah persisted and waited. And God did act. Or how about Moses on the mountain of Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights as God established with him and the

people a new covenant and gave Moses the commandments. Or how about the Apostle Paul who waited 3 years following his Emmaus road encounter to begin his ministry. Or even our dear Lord and Savior waited 40 days in the wilderness where he was famished from fasting and tempted by satan. And of course, there was the 3 days wait from Good Friday to Easter morning.

Our text from Ezekiel is all about waiting. The people of Israel have been waiting in exile. They have been longing for God to do something. To free them from their bondage and return them to their beloved home. Their spirits had grown faint. Their hearts parched for God. Their bones dry and brittle. Waiting. Longing. For new life. For hope. And God acts. God, always with them, responds in God's time and brings new life out of dry bones.

So many examples of waiting and many more we didn't include. The psalms are full of writers waiting for the Lord to act. Waiting to hear God's voice. It's part of who we are. Waiting is hard; especially, today with our cell phones and modern technology. We have almost instant feedback to anything it seems. When we send a text message and don't get a quick response back we wonder what is taking so long. Did they get the message? Is the person on the other end OK? Did something happen to them? And then we might start to panic. Maybe even think they are avoiding us. In many ways, I think waiting is harder because of how quickly we have access to information, services, media, etc. Yet, waiting is part of life. It almost seems to be part of God's plan.

Often in our waiting we respond just as Mary and Martha do in our text this morning. They can't fathom why Jesus waited so long. Waited to come to their aid. Waited to respond to their request for help. Waited to come to the help of his dear friend whom he loved deeply

and whose illness and death grieved him dearly. Mary and Martha both ask Jesus essentially the same question, “Why Lord? Why did you take so long to arrive? What were you doing? If you had been here our brother would not have died?” You can hear the pain running through those questions. You can sense their frustration, possibly even anger, with Jesus. And of course the text tells us part of why Jesus waited so that God’s glory might be revealed. Yet, did it have to be 4 days? Couldn’t Jesus have come immediately following Lazarus’ death and raised him back to life?

I always think part of the gospel, that is good news, of this passage and others is the freedom to ask the tough questions. The ability to stand with Mary and Martha and ask, “Why Jesus?” “Where were you Jesus?” The grace to approach him with whatever it is we experience be it pain, frustration, sorrow, and yes even anger. We don’t always hear an answer and we may never know why we wait. Why God doesn’t act sooner. But one thing we cling to is that we are never alone in our waiting. Jesus is there. He does respond. He does act. He does grieve.

God will act in God’s time. The waiting is challenging. Yet, it seems vital and necessary to our journey of faith because through that waiting God is at work. God is with us. Following my recovery from neck surgery each day I began to feel a little better. Some days I really contemplated coming over here, to my office, to respond to emails, to go to a council meeting, to attend a Wednesday Lent meal and worship, and other activities. I had to restrain myself because I knew that is what my body needed. The temptation to move beyond the waiting runs rampant in each of us. That is part of our society. The pressures to return to work or

school are great. If we don't we will be so far behind. Yet, waiting is so important to our souls, to our physical and mental well-being.

Over the years I have learned one thing about the church. Things often don't move quickly. We want quick answers to the perceived problems we see. We want instantaneous results to something we feel God is calling us to. And when they don't come we often give up hope that God is acting. Perhaps, we even begin to point fingers. Yet, often the seed is planted and God will bring forth the blossoms in due time – God's time, not our time. All we can do is simply wait. Trust. Hope. Pray. Be patient. Know that we are not alone. That God will act. God will bring new life. God will free us from that which binds us. And God will use us during that waiting. Jesus took the disciples with him in our text today. The Jewish people that came to be with Mary and Martha as they waited for Jesus comforted and consoled once again bringing God's presence near. And Jesus then enlists their help to carry out God's glory in raising Lazarus. He instructs them to roll back the stone which blocked the entrance of the tomb. He instructs them to untie the cloths, which had bound his once dead body. While we wait, we are still active participants in God's mission and are called in the midst of our waiting to tell the world about this wonderful God that is with us. That loves us. That forgives us. That meets us in our waiting. And that acts. That saves. That grieves with the world that grieves. That meets us on the cross and then opens us up to new life Easter morning.