

John 11:1-45  
March 29, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

Waiting. It's an inherent part of life in the flesh. I'm not entirely fond of waiting and I suspect many of you may concur. With our cell phones in hand, it seems we have almost instant access to so many things. Friends and family. Millions of products we can purchase with a touch or two. Answers to our most pondering questions. Just the other day we were driving down the interstate when my wife spotted several deer running through a passing field. She asked, "How fast do you think a deer can run?" I responded, "Ask Siri." Well, I don't believe she ever did. But, when I got home, I asked Siri and of course, she had an answer – 35 mph for the average white-tail deer.

Despite all of this, there are still seasons in our lives where we find ourselves waiting and it simply seems there is nothing we can do. Several years ago, I found myself waiting for surgery to relieve the shooting pain through my arm the result of a herniated disc in my neck. Surgery couldn't come soon enough. The waiting was excruciating on multiple levels. Alas, the day did finally come and in a matter of hours I was free from the pain that had plagued me for weeks.

We are nearing the completion of Lent. A season of waiting. A season of longing. Each year as Lent draws to a close, we know the fragrant smells of Easter lilies surrounding the altar behind me, the glorious songs we love to sing that morning, and the good news of the resurrection are near at hand. Our waiting will at long last be over.

Yet, this year, it's all different. What will that day look like? Will we even be able to gather in person? As of now, the answer is more than likely no. We are in a waiting period the likes none of us have experienced before. Waiting on multiple levels. To return to school and be reunited with classmates and teachers. To

return to work and if we have been let go, hope we have a job to return to. To be able to finally let a neighbor get within our invisible 6' bubble we each have tried to establish around us. Waiting for much needed medical supplies. Possibly waiting for the results of a test to see whether you or someone you know has this virus. Waiting to come out of our houses and back to life as we knew it just a couple of weeks ago. Waiting for the light at the end of the tunnel. Waiting for a sign of hope.

Waiting is challenging yet the Bible is full of people waiting. Waiting for God to act. 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. Moses was on the mountain of Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights as God established with him and the people of Israel a new covenant. Or how about the Apostle Paul who waited 3 years following his Emmaus road encounter with the risen Christ 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. Or, how about our text from Ezekiel. The people of Israel have been waiting in exile. Longing for God to return them to their beloved home. Their spirits had grown faint. Their aching hearts dry and brittle. God, always with them, responds in God's time and brings life into their time of waiting.

This week, I read it is best to keep online worship brief and simple; especially, if you are trying it for the first time. Thus, I shortened some of our liturgy from last week. Took an item or two out and tried my best to condense our lengthy gospel message. In hindsight, I wish I hadn't done that because what I left out is that Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, are in their own period of waiting. Lazarus has become seriously ill and they have sent word to Jesus stating, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." Yet, Jesus remains where he is and eventually does travel to Bethany in which we learn upon his arrival Lazarus is dead and has already been in the tomb four days. When Jesus arrives, the sisters individually and separately ask, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

At times, our waiting may lead to similar questions. “Lord, why didn’t you show up?” “God, why have you not yet eradicated this virus and freed humanity from the illness and death it is causing along with the state of economic turbulence and mental anguish that also comes with it?” We don’t always have answers to why someone becomes ill or even dies. We don’t always have an answer to why a virus suddenly seems to come out of nowhere. But what today’s passages do reveal is that God will not leave us amidst our waiting. God will and does act.

Jesus reveals to the world multiple things as he comes to the side of his fallen brother. Jesus wept. Jesus was disturbed. Several times John tells us this fact. In our time of waiting this virus to pass and life to return to some state of normalcy, Jesus too is greatly disturbed. He, too, is weeping with the world. Jesus reveals the heart of God and it is a heart that suffers right along with our suffering. It is a heart that meets us in our pain and in our waiting. Jesus also reveals death will never have the final say. He has the power to bring life out of death, which is the very point he is making in this passage.

In this story, we are given a picture of what awaits Jesus and what God will do through his death. He, too, will soon endure great suffering and die upon the cross. He too will wait in the tomb for God to act and God will indeed act in raising Jesus to life. It may be the season of Lent we are in, awaiting for the Easter celebration but make no mistake that each and every time the church gathers in worship, be it in person or over the internet, is a time of celebration and life as people of the resurrection. We are an Easter people.

Let us never forget that. Amidst the darkest of days and dreariest of times, we will wait in certainty that we are not alone. We will confidently wait knowing God will act. God is already acting. People coming to the aid of one another. Doctors and nurses putting their lives on the line to comfort the ill and heal the sick. Companies switching gears, halting production, and making much needed supplies they have never produced before. So many stories, examples, and ways in which God is at work amidst this pandemic.

I know we bury, so to speak, our “Alleluias” during Lent. However, tough times calls us often to reevaluate and possibly change our course of action. I have to had to rethink virtually every aspect of ministry these last two week and as I prayed this morning and began to write the Spirit gave me many words, but one in particular as I came to a close. “Alleluia” and the freedom to proclaim it. “Praise the Lord.” Because we have so much to praise the Lord for. Praise the Lord for being present in our time of waiting! Praise the Lord for hearing our prayers! Praise the Lord for weeping alongside the world! Praise the Lord for hope the Spirit equips us with! Praise the Lord for the many ways in which people are helping one another through this difficult time revealing the light of Christ shining through the darkness! Praise the Lord for the sure and certain promise of Easter! Death will not have the final say. This virus will not have the final say. God will. Life will. Life given to all through the cross of Good Friday and the empty tomb of Easter morning. Praise the Lord for the wondrous love of God we have through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.