

Sunday November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
24<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost

**PRAYER:** Our world is in eclipse, Lord. The sun has been blotted out, the moon sheds no light, the stars are dropping from the skies-all is night. We have lost faith in our laws; now we must trust the law you write upon the heart. O God, we sit in darkness; let us see a great light! (Isaiah 9:2)

**OFFERTORY SENTENCE:** The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:1 of our proper response to God's gracious love when he said, "Therefore, I urge you, brethren, in view of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-which is your spiritual worship."

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** God of Adam, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God of Moses, and all the prophets, God of the disciples and the early church and God of First Baptist Church, we lift our voices of praise and thanksgiving to join the everlasting chorus. We like the Cherubim and Seraphim shout the glory of your Kingdom. Like the Apostle Paul we tell the world of your power! We stand and deliver our witness to all the world of your mighty deeds and your glorious splendor. We bless your sacred and holy name, Lord, for it is by your grace we are saved; by your mercy, forgiven; by your forbearance, accepted; by your love, restored! And by this grace we are transformed to being gracious and merciful; and by your patience, we become patient; and by your love, we become loving.

This miracle is so-not because of anything we have done, but because of what you have done! As the author of Hebrews declared, "Every priest stands daily at services, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." But Jesus Christ, once and for all, embodied our relationship with you. And the Holy Spirit works at all times to write its good news upon our hearts. Yes, our salvation is already accomplished, not by our acts, but by your act-not in another world, but in this world; not in another time, but in this time. All this you have promised.

And still there is much more. For in your boundless love, you have vowed, "I will remember your sins and misdeeds no more." All is done; all is forgiven-even before our wavering, even before our failing, even before our pleading, even before our trembling. How can we not bless your name?

Yours is a name with so much mystery. We do not know the true nature of the face behind the mystery.

Hannah saw you as the one that set the world on the pillars of the earth, and as the one who brings low the mighty and lifts high the meek. Isaiah conceived you as "Mother"; he uttered your word to Israel, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the child of her womb? I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15) And Jesus regarded you as Father; he told of your provision even for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

Who are you, O God, who remembers your creatures, but no more their sin? You are everything but you are also not just a thing. You are both a terrifying door into the unknown and the comforting embrace at the threshold!

O Lord, we call upon your name, which is above every name and gives meaning to all names. Usher us through that door, and we shall serve you, whose realm is eternal and whose dominion is everlasting!

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Hebrews 10:11-18  
“What Is He Waiting For?”

There was a time when a man was sentenced to be executed and was living on death row. As the day of his execution drew near, the prison warden asked the man what he wanted for his last meal. The inmate said, “I would like to have a huge piece of watermelon.” The warden said, “You must be kidding? This is December. Watermelons have not been planted, let alone harvested.” The inmate replied, “That’s okay. I don’t mind waiting.”

The inmate’s response to waiting is rare, but understandable given the circumstances. For most of us, however, waiting is an unwelcome activity. Yet, for something so unwanted, we certainly seem to do more than our fair share of waiting. Waiting is a huge part of our lives. We even have, in this culture, rooms specifically created for waiting; literally called “waiting rooms”.

Waiting rooms, or as they are sometimes called, “reception areas”, are often not the best places to be. The magazines, for example, are often ten years out of date. In fact, in a recent waiting room I was in, they had a MacLean’s magazine so old; it was lamenting the introduction of the GST, and speculating about how it might affect the Mulroney government. And just take a look at the other people in those waiting rooms.

No one wants to be in that room. No one wants to be wasting their time waiting. The emotions in a waiting room can run from total indifference to outright panic. In fact, that is likely the greatest hazard to waiting. Waiting, causes us to become quite anxious. Just ask how anxious people became waiting for the doctor, and fearing catching something from other sick people in the room. And because we wait so much, we also probably worry a whole lot. Take a moment now, and just think about how much waiting we do.

We wait in traffic. We wait for the bathroom (a situation that grows exponentially the more teenagers you have in your home). We wait for the mail, the email, or a special delivery package. We wait for that important phone call. We wait for that person to ask us out, or tell us how they really feel. We wait for our spouses to finally understand us, our kids to respect us, and our parents to let us finally become the adults we know we are.

We wait in line for the bus, to order our hamburgers, to get tickets to a movie. We wait for our pay checks, our lottery wins, or simply for our ship to come in. We wait for our co-workers to do their jobs so we can do ours. We wait for our spouse, or children to get dressed so we can make our appointment on time. We wait through what seems an inexhaustible list of kids, simply to see our own child get: their prize, diploma, or degree.

We wait for the good news or the bad news. We wait for the doctor to tell us what he or she has found in all those tests. Then we wait for a surgery time, or treatment time, or a chance to see the specialist. Then we wait it out in recovery, anxious to get back to work or simply back to the life that has been put on hold. Some of us know what it is like to wait for a loved one to die, and to be relieved of their suffering.

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Some of us know what it is like to wait for immigration hearings, or the paper work to be processed so as to bring over our loved ones from foreign soil. Some of us wait for love, or for hope, or for justice. Waiting. We always seem to be waiting. And as I said, waiting causes anxiety. We are an impatient lot, you and I. Like so many in our society, we are used to instant gratification.

We dislike waiting so much, we even refuse to get out of cars to get a coffee or food. We call it a drive-thru. More like a slow-thru. If I want something, I want it now. We also get down right furious when people seem to be able to parlay their celebrity, or status, in ways so they can jump the queue ahead of others. Such as a few years ago, hockey players getting the flu shot ahead of pregnant women.

One solution to our distaste for waiting is to speed things up, and so we start to find creative ways to cut our wait times. Sometimes our strategies are okay, and legitimate tricks we can employ, but often in our rush to end our waiting, we cause more problems than the initial problem.

For example: I get tired of waiting in traffic, so when traffic opens up, I drive like a maniac to make up the time I lost, and end up crashing my car. Or how about, I am tired of just getting by financially, so I try and hasten the growth in my bank account by: cheating on my taxes, or paying cash to avoid taxes, or heading to the casino, or horrors of horrors, stealing from someone or my employer.

What if I am lonely, and tired of waiting for that special someone? Does my waiting too long entitle me to get into a relationship that is not healthy, simply so I won't be lonely? If, I am tired of waiting for justice, does that give me license to take matters into my own hands? That's the reasoning behind most terrorists, and vigilantes. You get my point, don't you? Waiting is rough and when we refuse to wait, bad things happen.

Let me suggest that this feeling of discomfort, if not outright anguish we feel at waiting, is at its very heart, a frustration, and anger, over the condition of our lives. Waiting whether in traffic, or in a doctor's office, reveals that as much as I like to think I am in complete control of my life, I am not. What is even more frightening to contemplate, is that if I think my current life's circumstance is unacceptable, I am also probably aware that there is very little I can do to make things better.

Now, I know there are things we can do to lessen the negative impact of our waiting for a better life. If I am overly anxious, and finding life overwhelming, or my relationships are strained, I can get counseling. If I am unhappy with my current financial situation, I could ask for a raise at work, take on a second job, or change employment. Yes, there are some things we can do, but in most cases, there is very little we can do.

We are, where we are. So, our heart's cry might be "How long O Lord?" Do you realize how much waiting is documented in the bible? And further do you realize the utter anguish that waiting caused? The Israelites wandered for forty years.

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How long, O Lord? Noah floated in his ark for many days. How long, O Lord? Hannah waited for a son, as did Elizabeth. How long, O Lord?

And all of Israel waited for the Messiah to deliver them. How long, O Lord? It seems that being God fearing people does not exempt us from waiting. In fact, let me boldly suggest that maybe being God's people makes our waiting worse. The writer to the Hebrews speaks boldly of how Christ has ended sin's hold on us once and for all, and because Jesus is our high priest, we can boldly enter into God's very throne room.

This he writes, "In a new, life giving way". So, why do we still suffer, especially when our life goes in ways contrary to what we believe is best for us? An image came to me this week, which spoke of my personal feelings on this subject.

Most of you know the comic strip "Peanuts" that Charles Shultz created. In that series of strips there is an ongoing event that occurs between Lucy and Charlie Brown. Lucy brings a football out to the yard and holds it in place for Charlie Brown to kick it. Time after time, Charlie Brown trusts Lucy and runs at the ball to kick it a mile only to have Lucy pull it away at the last minute.

Charlie Brown never gets to kick that football, does he. Sometimes faith feels like that. Everything seems to line up perfectly in our understanding of what God has done for us. We know God loves us and we believe this to be true. Then just as we are about to kick faith into high gear, life comes along and yanks the ball away from us, leaving us to fall flat on our backs. How long, O Lord?

How long must I struggle along, waiting for this abundant life you promised? When, O God is my faith in you going to make my marriage better, my relationship with my kids better, my job better; quite frankly my life better? Where in the world, O Lord, is this better, life giving way? It is no wonder the writer of Hebrews has to encourage his readers to hold on tightly to the hope we have in God.

Especially when it seems we are at the end of our ropes and the rope is fraying. How can God be so patient with a world that makes our lives so miserable at times? If God would only do things my way, everything would be okay. Really!? If God would just make the traffic get out of my way, the doctor gives me the best diagnosis, my spouse gets ready on time, that I get the best tickets for the play, etc., etc., and etc.; everything would be okay.

If Lucy would just hold that ball, so I can kick it, everything would be just great. But as we all know, life doesn't work that way. Bad things do happen to good, bad and mediocre people. As Jesus said, "The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike". "Stuff happens!" according to Forest Gump, although he used a different word instead of "stuff" which I can't use here. Stuff does happen, to you and to me, and we keep on waiting.

What then can we do, while we wait through this stuff of life? Where is the joy in "Mudville"?

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It was very hard this year not to be reminded again of the darkest summer of my life. Most of you know that my brother Ian died earlier this year, but most of you probably don't know that Ian was handicapped, and lived in a group home in Brantford called Participation House. In the early spring of 1979, he sought to end his life with Carbon-monoxide poisoning.

The resulting damage to his brain was extensive, and for the first several months after the initial poisoning, Ian struggled to survive in the Toronto General hospital. For many weeks, we didn't know if he would survive. Many times, I was called to Toronto with my family, because they didn't know if he would survive the night. In that summer I became intimately familiar with waiting rooms, old magazines included.

I spent days upon days in them, eating hospital food, and wandering hallways to break the monotony. Maybe it was out of boredom at first, but soon we discovered something interesting, and life affirming in those waiting rooms. In those waiting rooms were other families, anxious about their loved ones.

People who were just as fearful about what news the doctor might bring next, as we were. As the days passed by; we got to know the other waiting room regulars by name. We shared meals, played card games, swapped stories, listened with great concern for their recent news about their loved ones. On occasion we even visited some of the loved ones, who were complete strangers to us.

We cried with those who lost loved ones. We celebrated when someone went home. We prayed for them all, as they did for us. As time went on, the waiting, although still painful and anxiety ridden; became a bit more bearable. I think this is so because we no longer felt we traveled the road alone; that someone else understood what it was like to wait. To wait for hope, for good news, and for some piece of grace to fall into our lives.

I heard it said, and I believe it with my whole heart; that one of the great equalizers on this planet is an Intensive Care waiting room. No one cares in that waiting room whether you are rich, or poor, male or female, or what country or religion you represent. All anyone knows, and cares about, is that you have someone you love just a few feet away clinging to life. Nothing matters in those moments, then to know we are not alone.

The writer to the Hebrews states, "And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near." That is the answer to our anxiety, our fearfulness and our waiting. This sanctuary is in many ways our waiting room. In this place we bring ourselves to wait, to pray and to find encouragement.

If life is taking a strip off you, then you need to be here. If you don't think your spouse understands you, your kids are out of control or your boss hates you; then you need to be here. If you don't know how to cope with loneliness, or financial instability or some kind of medical trauma in your life or your loved one's life; then you certainly need to be here.

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Because this is God's waiting room, where the faithful wait for the good word from the great physician. In this waiting room people are honest that life is not always what it is cracked up to be and we are finding it hard to cope. In this waiting room we help each other wait it out by: praying for each other, by sharing a meal, and by even playing a game or two to pass the time. Together we share laughter, and yes, some tears.

In this waiting room, we lovingly warn each other of the dangers of not waiting for God's timing. In this waiting room; we wait for the culmination of all of God's work, and we wait with assurance that no matter what happens to us we are never, ever, ever, cut off from the love of God. There is a certainty in life that you are going to wait. You are going to wait for simple things and some life altering things. The only question to ask yourself is where are you going to wait?

Are you going to wait alone? Are you going to wait with the world or are you going to join the only group of waiting souls that knows the hope that is available to all who seek it? The choice is yours.