

Being Faithful While Waiting

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Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Do you remember points in your life when you really understood something that helped you so much in life? Maybe it was something about life, something about yourself, something about others, something about relationships, something about emotions, or maybe something about self-control as well as what seems to be things you can't seem to control.

The list is long if you take time to think about what things you realized or learned, and maybe you don't even remember some of them for yourself, but you saw it in others.

It's like watching a little ones realize they can more than crawl, but actually climb. You might have had a child, currently have a child, or baby sat, or witnessed a child go from only crawling around to seemingly suddenly climb up and onto things like a couch, a table, or even higher. Then a child can climb out of their cribs, surprising you when you walk into their room to find that the crib no longer contains them.

I always love seeing little ones who learn not only to walk, but then to run. Now that's a different stage for parents indeed, when instead of being able to turn around and know their

child won't go too far to the stage of knowing if you don't pay attention enough they can be running away more than you'd want or feel comfortable with.

Now think of either when you were a youth or of a youth you know or even who lives in your house, and the time when the realization comes that life is not only about being taken care of but that one must learn to take care of one's self more and more. Being more and more self-sufficient, if you want to say, is not only something desired but realized as something that will one day be more and more required.

I remember the days when I wanted to be more independent, not just the childish comment such as "I do it myself," but rather that I better learn how to do certain things myself so that I'm ready when I need and have to do them myself.

We as adults had to learn over the early years to take care of ourselves, to take care of the things we were blessed to receive as well as be able to earn, to create, and to attain. Then there are stages for each of us as we go through different things in our lives.

And what people sometimes do not realize is how important those moments between those stages were.

And one of the toughest times to make the most of the moments is during times of waiting.

Just as since we journeyed with Jesus, and if you consider his entire life, people waited for his arrival which was in his birth. Then they waited for his time to begin ushering in the kingdom of God, which began when Jesus was about 30 years old. And of course people misunderstood as something immediate when Jesus began his ministry, but were sorely disappointed when he died on the cross at around the age of 33. They hid and fearfully as they did not know what to do. Of course they were surprised and joyous when Jesus resurrected. But they were still confused too.

And after 40 days of Jesus appearing to them, they thought surely Jesus would restore the kingdom God at that time. But again, Jesus does not do as they expect.

There were so many times and moments of waiting. In last week's message I mentioned how the disciples did not understand. They showed they didn't understand when while waiting Peter and the other disciples who had seen Jesus after resurrecting, went back to fishing. They forgot the calling to fish for people and no longer for fish when Jesus first called them some three years earlier. All those years with Jesus, and they did not know what it was Jesus called them to do.

Waiting is so difficult at times. We are in a time when waiting seems to be all that we can do, and understandably for good reasons.

It's tempting to forget at times why we are doing all that we are, or for some, to forget for whom we are doing it for.

No doubt the disciples did not really understand what all was going on. We are revealed to that right before Jesus ascends to heaven one last time, when the disciples asked if it was time that Jesus began his eternal reign on earth. It would have made sense to them, especially after all they went through and Jesus appearing to them over a 40-day period. It seemed to be about time. They asked Jesus in the past if it was time. Palm Sunday seemed to have been a good time. They weren't then and it wasn't at that time either.

Jesus disappointed them again, and this time in a most major way. For even when they went through the saddest time in their lives in having to see Jesus arrested, crucified, and dead. Jesus came back. But this time they would learn Jesus would leave and not return like he did before. Jesus reappeared many times in the 40 days after he resurrected.

Thankfully, in his last departure, Jesus said that they needed to stay in Jerusalem until the gift of God's Holy Spirit was given. This time, since Jesus knew he'd be away indefinitely, until the time that only God the Father knows, the disciples needed God's help to be faithful to the mission Christ gave to them.

Otherwise, just as they acted when Jesus died and even after he rose from the dead, the disciples would not have the power to be faithful in the long run without God's help.

As I mentioned last week, it sometimes takes a lot of practice to remember to do certain things, especially if one is used to being told regularly by someone else. It is wonderful when they are no longer told and they have learned to do it on their own. And even better is when the not only do it out of habit but do it because they know the value of doing so.

More than being independent and self-sufficient, as followers of Jesus, we are to no longer be like babies, baby Christians that is. Though we are connected and dependent on Christ as our Lord, Savior, Good Shepherd, and friend, we are to grow to be disciples who are faithful witnesses individually, not only as a fellowship of believers.

Surely how we stay connected like branches to the vine, as Jesus said (John 15:5), we are empowered by the power and presence of God within us through God's very Holy Spirit. We take time every year to celebrate the gift of God's Holy Spirit, this year at the end of May with Pentecost Sunday.

Different from the disciples is that we today have received the Holy Spirit, which they did not until the first Pentecost. And with the gift of God's Holy Spirit, they fully understood and had the power to be faithful, even to the point of death. As followers of Jesus today and since the gift of the Holy Spirit was given, we do not have to wait as the disciples did. And we do not have the excuse the disciples did when they said they did not understand, when they forgot,

when they faltered, and when they stopped following Jesus's instructions before receiving the Holy Spirit.

When they did receive the Holy Spirit, and you can read the Bible for yourself if you don't remember, all heaven broke loose and people were being saved left and right. And since then, people have been and will continue to be saved through faithful disciples and witnesses, who include you and me.

Waiting is often no fun. It can be at times very challenging, daunting, and even super frustrating. It's easy to lose focus, grow pessimistic, feel let down, and even like it is hopeless.

You'll find throughout history that from the early disciples, there were times when they not only suffered and persevered, but also prayed that Jesus would return soon. Some even thought Jesus would, and within their lifetime. Of course they also remembered that though they hoped and wanted Jesus to return soon, that Jesus indeed said that the day and time no one knew nor could predict, as some foolish people have tried with sad results. Not only have people worried themselves needlessly when someone convinced enough people that they possibly knew when Jesus would return, but then those who were fully convinced would actually sell everything and leave to a place to wait for Christ to return as predicted to find themselves still there and Jesus not having returned, then wondering what to do next. I knew of someone whose family did that, and it was most tragic and sad.

Fortunately, when the disciples did received the Holy Spirit, and as Jesus said they received the power of God to be faithful witnesses. They were able to be faithful while waiting for Jesus to return.

Jesus told them about the gift of the Holy Spirit, even before he went to the cross, and that though he'd leave them, which was not only for the time he was dead for three days before rising, but also for the day he'd ascend to heaven, that he would not leave them as orphans (John 14:18-27). The Holy Spirit would be given to them and would teach them all things and to remind them of everything Jesus said to them.

We have been given God's Holy Spirit as believers and follower of Jesus Christ, the same Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead. (Romans 8:10-11)

We have that same power of God within us, not for our own benefit but also so that we can live faithfully until we've finished the days God grants us on earth or until Jesus returns again, if he returns during our lifetime.

What's difficult in waiting and being faithful is when we no longer live by the Holy Spirit, when we stop listening to God's often quiet voice, when we like the disciples before receiving the Holy Spirit so easily forgot what it is we are supposed to be doing as we live for Jesus and not only for ourselves.

It is so easy to not live for God, to not follow Jesus, and to think that by simply taking the gift of salvation is good enough. Jesus calls us to follow, which is part of what it means to place our faith in him. It's a daily way of living for all of our lives.

This is one of the hardest things to remember and do when we are still like infant Christians, which sadly many Christians tend to remain being. They have not transitions from crawling and even climbing to walking and running the race set out for us to run (Hebrews 12:1-3).

While waiting, it feels at times, we must not forget to fix our eyes on Jesus, not forget what it means to walk faithfully with Christ in every area of our life.

And while waiting and when it's easier for us to slide away from following Jesus as closely and fervently, we surely can be more faithful, we can follow more intentionally than become wanderers, we can be more witnesses of Christ, and we can be more loving towards others as we love God.

It takes even more work when in times like these we feel there's not much more we can do. It takes more intention, it takes more perseverance, it takes more focus, and it takes more than what you and I possess. That is why God helps with the Holy Spirit that connects us with Christ like the branches to the vine.

We are told that God has given us everything we need to live for Him. (2 Peter 1:3)

Just as the disciples learned, they needed to grow in their closeness with Christ and rely on God's Holy Spirit in everything, especially in remembering what it meant for them to be faithful to Christ while they waited for his return.

So how are we being faithful while waiting? In these times of waiting this pandemic out, and all the challenges we face, let us not forget to be faithful in every way we are to be faithful, as we live for, follow, as well as wait for Christ to return one day.

How do you begin each day intentionally for God?

How do you use your time, your resources, your emotions, thoughts, and words for Christ?

How do you feed your heart, mind, and soul, not only body?

How do you serve God in your families, among your friends, as well as strangers and even those who may be called enemies?

How do you see your part in the sharing of God's saving grace and love through Jesus Christ?

I could keep asking questions like these. But I think those are enough for you to ask yourselves on a regular basis.

There are just a few questions to ask on a regular basis.

Though we worship on Sundays, on a weekly basis, as a church, we are to worship God each and every day with our lives.

Though we are to remember what it means regularly to be followers of Christ, we must also daily take up our cross and follow him. (Luke 9:23)

Doing so will not only increase your faith but also your maturity in and closeness to Christ throughout your life. You will truly experience the power and amazing presence of God within you through the Holy Spirit which will allow you find in Christ the amazing grace, love, hope, peace, joy, and all that are parts of the many gifts of God and God's Holy Spirit.

During these days, as we are confined and waiting, take the time to ask yourself how you are being faithful as witnesses and growing in faith as you wait...as we all wait...for the day Christ returns. Amen.