

Sermon for May 28, 2017

**A Waiting Room** (Acts 1:6-14)

Most of us spend a lot of time in waiting rooms – at doctors' offices, dentists' offices, airports and other places.

I would like you to think of a recent time when you were in a waiting room with other people – any type of waiting room. Think of one you can picture and remember.

What were you waiting for?

Where were you?

Who else was in the room?

What was available for you to do in the waiting room? What *did* you do while you were waiting?

How did you feel while you were waiting?

Not now, but in a minute I will ask you to turn to a pew pal (as my friend Kathy Fretheim calls them) and tell your pew pal about your waiting room experience. Not now, but in a minute. If there is an odd number in your pew, please make a group of 3. If you see someone sitting alone will someone please move to join that person. You will have about two minutes to discuss your waiting experience with your pew pals. Share only what you are comfortable sharing.

Please start now.

Time is up. Did anyone have trouble thinking of a waiting room experience? It seems to me we spend vast amounts of our lives waiting for one thing or another.

In chapter one of the book of Acts, which George read this morning, the disciples ended up in a waiting room. The author of the book tells what happened before the waiting room experience. In fact, the author wrote the Gospel of Luke as well, so really Chapter One of Acts is the beginning of the sequel.

Let's just briefly review. The disciples have spent three years following Jesus around, watching him, listening to him and trying to learn what he is teaching them. They have formed relationships with him and with each other. Then the disciples go through the trauma of Jesus' death. And although they experience great joy at the resurrection, the disciples are living a weird and confusing reality. Think about it. Mary saw someone she thought was a gardener but then realized was Jesus. Cleopas and another disciple walked 7 miles with Jesus without recognizing him. Thomas had to actually touch Jesus to believe. Sometimes they had the reassurance of Jesus' presence, but life was, to understate it, unsettled. This went on for forty days, a symbolic sacred time. (p. 185 New Testament, Oxford Annotated Bible)

And then we come to this passage in Acts, where Jesus spoke to his disciples on a mountain top and then disappeared. The disciples seemed to know that this was the last time they would see him. Who

knows how long the disciples would have gone on staring into space if two men, presumably angels, had not prodded them to move on. So the disciples walked back to Jerusalem, a short walk, a Sabbath walk, which is about one kilometer.

I wonder if they talked much while they walked? What could they say? Would they have moved quickly or slowly?

They came to an upper room, possibly the same one in which they had eaten the Last Supper.

I am going to ask you to imagine yourself in that upper room. I have asked Marilyn to play "Wait for the Lord" five times and as she plays we will sing. It's Voices United #22.

Imagine yourself in a room with no distractions, no endless news on TV, no cell phones, no announcements, nothing to read and probably not much coming and going. You are with a group of good friends who have shared your recent experiences. You are waiting.

You are not clear how long you will have to wait – probably a few days. You have been told that the timing is not your business (Acts 1:7 The Message translation).

Jesus has told you that you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, but you have no clear idea of what that will be like. You might feel anxious.

You and your friends have spent three years with Jesus. He is no longer present but your companions have seen what you have seen, been where you have been, walked where you have walked. You look around. Who do you see?

There's Peter. Jesus gave him that name. His old name was Simon but Peter means Rock so presumably Jesus saw Peter as a rock, even though very recently Peter had denied Jesus. Peter – impulsive, but a leader.

There's John – probably younger and faster on his feet than Peter. When he's angry he really lets loose. Jesus called John and John's brother James, also there, sons of thunder.

There's Mary, Jesus' mother, someone who has pondered the meaning of Jesus and his life for many years.

You look around at all the familiar faces. You know their names and their characters well.

There's Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, another James, Simon, and a person called Judas, but not the Judas who betrayed Jesus.

So there you are in the waiting room with your companions, no one sure what to do.

As a group, you start to reminisce about Jesus. And maybe these reminiscences were the beginnings of the Gospels. You and your companions are telling the stories that you lived with Jesus.

This passage in Acts tells us one thing that the disciples did in that waiting room: they prayed. In fact they “constantly devoted themselves to prayer.” In the waiting room.

And I wonder what that prayer looked like, sounded like. I am sure they reached into their rich Jewish heritage of prayer and used what they knew. I can imagine someone, maybe Peter, quoting Psalm 68, which we said this morning. I wonder if Peter thought of it because it says “lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds” and they had just seen Jesus taken out of sight by a cloud.

In that upper room, perhaps your companions remind each other of how to pray. Philip says, “Do you remember when Jesus said, ‘Knock and the door will be opened?’” (Luke 11:9). I can hear Andrew saying, “Do you remember when he said, ‘Ask and you will receive?’” (Matthew 7:7). Then Simon might say, “Do you remember when he told us to pray in our closets?” (Matthew 6: 5-6)

Jesus’ mother Mary might say, “I remember when at the wedding feast in Cana, I said to Jesus, ‘They have no wine.’ I was just making a comment, mentioning the situation, and then Jesus changed water to wine. I guess what I had said was a prayer.” (John 2:1-11)

Perhaps Bartholomew said, “Do you remember the story Jesus told of the widow who just kept nagging until she got what she wanted? And Jesus told us prayer was like that?” (Luke 18:1-8)

I can imagine one of the disciples, maybe John, saying, “Do you remember when we asked Jesus to teach us to pray? Do you remember what he said? Then together they would try to remember what we call the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13)

This waiting time, this time that looks frustrating, confusing and useless is becoming a fruitful time, a time to remember what Jesus has said about prayer and a time to actually pray.

They waited in that upstairs room. And we wait. We are in a waiting room right now. This waiting room differs from doctors’ offices and airports. In this space we wait with companions who know our names, our histories, our gifts and our faults. We wait with companions who can tell us stories of Jesus and prompt us to remember what we know of him. We wait with companions who know how to pray and will remind us when we forget. We have companions who will pray for us and with us. They remind us that we are named, known and loved by our great Friend and Companion.

We aren’t exactly sure what we are waiting for. Our interim ministry period is coming to an end. We don’t know how long we will have to wait for something new. We don’t know what the new thing will look like. We do know, because Jesus prayed to his Father for us, that we are protected so that we may be one (John 17:11).

We will not be waiting in *this* space for much longer this morning. We will be going out into the many other waiting rooms of our lives. Can you put aside some of the distractions? Can you talk to some of the people in those waiting rooms? Can you learn their names? Will you let them know your name? Can you spend time praying for the people in those rooms?

I would like to close with this short prayer:

Lord Jesus,

We ask that the waiting rooms of our lives will be fruitful places. We ask for companions who will remind us of what you have said and who will pray with us and for us as we wait. We ask also that we may be companions to others as they wait. Amen