

### *Waiting at the Mountain*

The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there. I'll give you the stone tablets with the instructions and the commandments that I've written in order to teach them." So Moses and his assistant Joshua got up, and Moses went up God's mountain. Moses had said to the elders, "Wait for us here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur will be here with you. Whoever has a legal dispute may go to them." Then Moses went up the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The Lord's glorious presence settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from the cloud. To the Israelites, the Lord's glorious presence looked like a blazing fire on top of the mountain. Moses entered the cloud and went up the mountain. Moses stayed on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

Ex. 24:12-18 (C.E.B.)

Can you wait a minute? I left something in my office.

*I will intentionally be gone for a full two minutes,  
which if you've ever waited, you'll know is a long time to wait.*

Thank you for waiting, I'm sorry it took so long. But can I ask, what did you do while you were waiting?

Our test this morning says Moses goes up on the mountain and waits for God. He waits six full days before God finally begins to talk (Ex. 24:16)! And while Moses was up on the mountain with God, the people waited for Moses. They waited forty days (Ex. 24:18)!

I know I'm not Moses, but I only asked you to wait for two minutes. How many of you would have waited six hours for me?

I wouldn't wait that long, either.

But we do know how to wait, don't we? We wait for our birthdays. We wait for Christmas. We wait for tax refunds – or if we're not getting a refund, we postpone paying our taxes and wait until April 15<sup>th</sup>. We wait for our spouses to get ready for church and our children to get ready for bed. We wait for lots of things. We even wait in lines!

- We wait in the checkout lines at the grocery store.
- We wait in lines at the post office.
- We wait in lines at the airport – first to check our luggage, then to walk through the metal detector, then to board the plane, and finally to get our luggage at the other end.

We go to the doctor's office and let them know we're there. We arrive a little early for our appointment and we wait. Then we're taken to the examining room and we wait again. Then we go to the Pharmacy and wait to give them our prescription. Then we wait before we can pick up our prescription.

We wait for the phone to ring and we wait for dinner. We wait for company to arrive at our house and we wait for our ride to school or work. When Ronda and I moved to El Dorado, we thought our waiting in traffic was over. But I've come to realize that the school traffic there is almost as bad as it is here in Wichita!

We all wait. And I don't know about you, but I'm not particularly fond of waiting. We are so accustomed to getting things in a hurry – we don't just eat fast food, we expect everything to happen fast – and as a result we get easily frustrated when we have to wait.

Of course, waiting isn't new, nor is it unique to our culture. Peter, James, and John famously had trouble waiting for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane – they couldn't stay awake (Mt. 26:40).

In our text for today, the people of Israel find themselves waiting (Ex. 24:14).

Of course, people do different things while they wait. At the airport a few years ago, I intentionally watched to see how different people wait. Let me know if one of these describes how you wait:

- Some anxiously pace the floor, continuously checking their watches.
- Some nervously check the mirrors and comb their hair and straighten their ties.
- Some belligerently complain about how long they have to wait – and everyone in the airport hears them complain. I won't ask if any of you have ever been one of those people.
- Some calmly find a place to close their eyes and take a nap.
- Some always take along a book to read.

We all wait, and we each have our own preferred way to “while away the time” while we wait.

Today is the last Sunday before Lent begins. For those who may not remember, Lent is the 40-day period of time preceding Easter. (Of course, if you count the days between Ash Wednesday and Easter you'll realize there are 46 days. That's because Sundays are never a part of Lent; they are always feast days.)

Lent is in many ways a time of waiting. I'd like to suggest that while we are waiting for Easter we can use Lent as a time of preparation, a time to prepare for the new life God has in store for us.

Traditionally, Lent was a season of fasting, not unlike the time Moses spent on the mountain or the time Jesus spent in the wilderness (Mt. 4:2). In more recent times, more and more people have used Lent as a time to focus on spiritual disciplines of all types, not just fasting.

- Some people will decide to spend specific times in prayer, whether that is a special hour of each day or a special day of each week.
- Some people will decide to spend more time reading scriptures during Lent, maybe intentionally reading through one or more of the Gospels over the course of the forty days of Lent.
- Some people will decide to be more generous in their financial giving or volunteering more time to a favorite charity.
- Some people will decide to do a traditional fast.

Fasting, by the way, can take several forms, as well. Some people will choose to not eat any food one day a week, or to not eat lunch any day during Lent. Others will choose to not eat a particular type of food for the entire season of Lent – something that is normally well loved like chocolate or caffeine in any form.

Over the years, I personally have observed Lent in a variety of ways.

- One year I fasted from caffeine, another year I fasted from anything with refined sugar in it.
- One year I fasted one meal a day, and another year I only ate one meal a day. (I did that so I could feel hungry every day as a way of connecting with those who are always hungry.)
- One year I wore my watch and set it to beep every hour; when it beeped, I said a prayer for a member of our church. I prayed for the entire membership of the church three times between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday.
- One year Ronda and I decided to focus on hospitality as a spiritual discipline, we invited different people into our home, one night every week.
- A couple of years ago I wrote notes to the 100 or so people who sent us Christmas cards, handwriting a note to two different people every day during Lent.

The possibilities are endless, and only limited by our imagination and our willingness to find a way to draw closer to God while we wait for Easter.

If you've never tried it, I would encourage you to find some spiritual discipline to work on while we wait for Easter. Take something on or give something up. Either option can make the waiting time a better experience. I don't want to tell you how to observe Lent, but I do want to encourage you to be intentional about the way you wait for Easter.

As a part of our worship experience this year, we will be inviting you to intentionally pray the Lord's Prayer each week. In addition, I will preach a series of sermons focusing on the idea of covenant and the various covenants we have with God and one another.

When "Moses went up God's mountain," our text says, "Moses had said to the elders, 'Wait for us here until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur will be here with you'" (Ex. 24:13-14).

You may remember, Aaron and Hur allowed the people of Israel to forget why they were waiting and for whom they were waiting while Moses was on the mountain. They ended up making a golden calf to worship (Ex. 32:1-4). They weren't very good at waiting, I guess. Although, as I said earlier, it would be hard to wait 40 days, especially since they didn't know how long they would be waiting.

It's easy to forget what we're waiting for when we wait forty days. It's part of why I encourage people to find something meaningful to do while we wait through the season of Lent. It is a continual reminder of what and for whom we are waiting.

The irony of this story is that Moses was receiving the law as a part of their covenant of obedience, only to come down the mountain to witness their disobedience. I often wonder if practicing a spiritual discipline while they waited would have helped.

What if Aaron and Hur gave them specific tasks to do while they waited? What if they were given the assignment of completing a congregational review while Moses was on the mountain?

Earlier, I said I was not Moses. But in many ways, my role here is the same as that of Aaron and Hur. We are in a season of waiting, a season of an unknown length. My task is to help you while you wait, to keep you from becoming distracted. Maybe we can think of Lent as a season to practice waiting, to learn how to prepare for this new season that will begin when a new pastor arrives.

And there is another way to think of waiting.

Since Ronda's surgery, I've found myself waiting on her at home. She doesn't have a bell to ring, but I do respond when she asks for something .. and there have been times when I've anticipated her needs before she has asked (probably not as much as would like me to, though).

I willingly wait on her as an expression of my love, as a way to meet her needs.

It has made me wonder if the spiritual disciplines I work on during Lent could be seen as tending to God's need as my guest, that I might become a waiter in this other sense of the word while I am waiting for Easter.

How attentive can I be to God's desires for me and my life?

Before Ronda's surgery, we enjoyed a meal at a nice restaurant. During dinner I was struck by the effective way we were waited on. Our waitress didn't listen in to our conversations – she let us eat – but she was attentive to our needs. She offered us an appetizer while we waited for our dinners, and she noticed when our glasses were empty, so they didn't stay that way very long.

And while I know it was her job, I made sure she knew I appreciated her attentiveness with a nice tip.

Depending upon who you speak to, an appetizer is intended to 'hold us over' until the main course arrives or to 'whet our appetite' while dinner is prepared. It may be a stretch, but maybe Lent could be seen as an appropriate appetizer for Easter, helping us wait.

What I've learned over the years is that for those who take it seriously, Lent is a wonderful and enriching way to "wait" for Easter as we prepare for the new life God has in store for us.

We will all wait for six weeks until Easter. How you wait, what you do while you wait, is up to you. I'm hoping it will help us learn how to wait together while the search committee does its job.

You see, we're all waiting for whatever God has in store for us.

Let's prepare by observing a holy Lent!

Amen.

Randy L Quinn  
Hope Mennonite Church

#### Selected Bibliography

- Craddock, Fred B.; John H. Hayes; Carl R. Holladay; Gene M. Tucker. *Preaching Through the Christian Year (Year A)*. Harrisburg: Trinity, 1992.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *Exodus (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching)*. Louisville: John Knox, 1991.
- Quinn, Randy L. "Waiting with Hur." Sermon preached February 10, 2002 at Sunnyside UMC; based on Exodus 24:12-18.