

Sermon: **Waiting...**

Text: Romans 8:18-25 / Genesis 12:1-9

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Harpswell, Maine

Delivered: November 29, 2009

*Hope that is not seen is not hope.
Who hopes for what is seen?
But if we hope for what we do not see
we wait for it with patience.*

We heard read the call of God to Abraham. *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.*

What land, Lord? *I will show you.*

Where is it, Lord? *I will show you.*

Someone has imagined what the ensuing conversation between Abraham and Sarah might have been like:

"Ah, Sarai, dear."

"Yes, Abram?"

"I've just had a word from God."

"How nice for you."

"God's told us to leave everything and go."

"Oh... so where are we going?"

"Ah well,... I don't know yet, but God will tell us when we get there."

(Paula Gooder, in *The Meaning is in the Waiting*)

Our scripture lesson continues, *So Abram went as the Lord told him... went to a place called Shecham... built an altar and worshiped the Lord...from there he moved on. And Abram journeyed on by stages.*

That's a pretty good description of our Christian journey of faith, isn't it. Sometimes we do not know quite where this may lead us but in faith and hope we step out and go; we worship God along the way, and move on, journeying by stages.

Abraham and Sarah become examples of faith and hope, and waiting in hope. The writer to the Hebrews said, *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* And the Apostle Paul said, *If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Advent is a season of waiting, and this First Sunday of Advent we lit the Candle of Hope.

Waiting is not idle passivity. In its biblical context it is usually a verb. It is the act of waiting. And Hope is not an idle wish. It is a guide for action and behavior.

The late Henri Nouwen said, *All the great spiritual leaders in history were people of hope. They all lived with a promise in their heart that guided them toward the future without the need to know exactly what it would look like.*

Martin Luther King said, *If you lose hope, you lose the vitality to keep life moving; you lose the courage to be. Hope is the quality that helps you going on in spite of it all.*

This act of waiting; this action of waiting... our culture does not do well. Living in hope seems fruitless. The worst part of waiting is the feeling of futility. We feel unproductive. Time is wasting and we're getting nowhere, getting nothing done, like standing in line for naught.

It's interesting to note that the verbs we usually use with the concept of time are words associated with money and finance. We *spend* our time. We *waste* our time. We try to *save* time. And we try to *manage* our time. We live by the tic of the clock and the flip of the calendar

page. This is *chronos* time. It is nothing more than the passing of time; a chronological sequence of events. But *kairos* time is all about the right time; the opportune moment. It relates to the unfolding purposes of God being worked out in the world and in our lives. Throughout the bible there are expressions such as, *When the time had come*. Or, *In the fullness of time*.

If we can learn to think and live less in terms of *chronos* time, and more in terms of *kairos* time, we will begin to learn what it is to wait in hope, and we will find that the times of waiting that seemed so unproductive have become some of the most spiritually productive times in our lives. God is able to teach us and accomplish things in our lives that could never be in the rush of *chronos* time.

In the waiting God might make the joy and reality of Christmas come alive to us. When we're in an impatient rush, the focus of our attention is on what we are doing and have yet to do to be ready for Christmas. But in quiet reflection and waiting, the focus shifts from the worries of what we have not yet done, to what God in love has already done and what he has given us in the birth of Jesus Christ.

In the waiting God might accomplish some of his purposes in us otherwise not possible. Instead of focusing on what we think should be happening but isn't, and fussing as to why it isn't or whose fault it is that it isn't, God may introduce us to some new ideas and purposes and accomplish what he wants to happen.

In the waiting God might show us how patient he is with us. When we are impatient with God, we're likely to be angry and irritable. But in the waiting, we might learn a new lesson in patience... not simply becoming more patient ourselves, but realizing how patient God is with us.

Antoine De-Saint Exupery, a French aviator and writer made the following observation. I think it applies very well to the season of Advent.

If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and assign them tasks and work. But rather, teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.

Advent is a season of waiting I hope... longing for God himself. I pray that it might be a very productive time in your life. As you focus your heart:

- not so much on what you have yet to do, but on what God has already done for you in Jesus Christ.
- not so much on what you think should be happening around you, but on what God is accomplishing in your life.
- not so much on your feelings of impatience, but on the patience of God's unending love for you.

May this season of waiting in hope be a good one for you.

Amen.