

“Stay Here”
Luke 24:36-49
4th Sunday of Easter

May 3, 2020
Westminster, Greenville
Ben Dorr

Twenty-three years ago this month,
when I graduated from seminary,
I had some difficulties staying in one place.

I don't mean staying in one physical place, although I did move quite a bit that year.

I mean staying in the place where life had taken me.

I wanted to begin my work in parish ministry, but no church seemed like the right fit. With one church, I withdrew before I graduated...then called them back a few weeks AFTER graduation and asked if I could be considered again...then called back AGAIN to say no, it didn't feel right.

Later that summer, when I was talking with another church, they offered the position and I said yes...then I called back the next morning and said no.

Back-and-forth, flip-flopping with search committees...I was young, they were gracious, but it felt awful.

Why was I doing this?

I was doing it because I did not want to wait.
I wanted my ministry to begin.
I did not want to stay where I was.
I did not want to be in a liminal place, a betwixt and between place.

If you and I find ourselves in a place that we do not want to be...
 it could be an emotional place,
 or a spiritual place,
 or a physical place,
 or simply a season of life—
 the instinct is to DO SOMETHING, right?

The temptation, I think, is to try to take control of those moments.
 to get ourselves OUT of those moments...

Of course, if I HAD taken control of that moment, I would never have gone to Texas, would not have had the experience at that first church that prepared me for the rest of my ministry, would not have met my wife...

Now, I'm VERY glad that God was asking me to wait.
 It was only 7 months of waiting.
 Why was it hard to wait?

In our text from Luke this morning, the risen Jesus gives his disciples some instructions.

- He tells them that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed...to all nations...”
- He tells them that they are his witnesses, that they will be carrying this good news forward.
- He tells them: “I am sending upon you what my Father promised...” In other words, the Holy Spirit will give them the power and courage and strength to do all these things.

It's a great CRESCENDO, if you will...and then:

“...so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The disciples are told...to stay.
To stay in the place where they are.
After all that build-up, they are told to wait.

We hear a lot of that in scripture, don't we?

Our passage from Isaiah this morning is a favorite of many:

“...they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.”

Who is it who shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint?

Not those who have the most money.
Not those who have the best education.
Not those who live in the nicest neighborhoods.

“...those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength...”

Have you ever seen someone who was really good at waiting?

One of my all-time favorite movies is *Cinema Paradiso*.

It tells the story of a boy in Italy who loves movies, and as this boy—Salvatore—enters his young adult years, he meets a girl named Elena.

One of my favorite scenes is when Salvatore declares his love for Elena.

And she replies, “I really like you, you’re sweet.
But I don’t love you.”

And Salvatore replies that he doesn’t care.
He’s going to wait for her.
He’s going to wait for her to fall in love with him.

And he’s going to do this by standing in the same place outside her home, every night after work, rain or shine.

That was in the summer.
And August becomes September becomes December.
And Salvatore waits and he waits and he waits.

And finally, after months and months of waiting, he decides on New Year’s Eve to give up...but Elena—who has been watching him wait from her window—she comes down and she finds Salvatore at the movie theater and she kisses Salvatore and Salvatore has finally found his love!

All his waiting has been worth it!

Except...a short time after that, when Elena’s father learns of the romance, he disapproves, and Elena’s family moves out of town and Salvatore goes into the military, and the love of his life is gone.

It sounds so depressing...
Now I know you think I can’t see you.
But I can see you!

I can see some of you thinking—why would Ben love that scene?

I love that scene because Salvatore's waiting *revealed who he was*.

He was faithful.

He was determined.

He was really in love with Elena, which Elena herself comes to see.

But I also love the scene because in the end, even after all that waiting, Salvatore's life did not go like he had planned. According to his plans, he and Elena would have not only fallen in love, but they would have gotten married and made their life together.

And that's not what happened.

Even after all of Salvatore's waiting,

he was not finally and firmly in control of his life.

Which, of course, is true for us too.

The past 6-7 weeks have been a reminder that none of us are finally and firmly in control in this life.

That seems to be what so much of waiting is about.

Learning to live with the lack of control that is at the heart of each of our lives. After all, the challenge of faithfully waiting is not limited to the coronavirus. It's a reality that will be with us, long after this pandemic has been defeated.

I'm thinking of the parents that are desperate for their child to make good decisions, they've tried all they know how to try...

and they have no control over those decisions,

and they will not abandon that child,

and they also cannot fix that child,

and they are staying where they are...it's not easy.

I'm thinking of...perhaps the grief that comes to a person—
and you don't want the grief,
thought you were through the grief...
but then it comes again
and you wonder why you are forced
to stay in that place?

What happens at those moments?
When we are forced to STAY in a season of life...to be in a place
we do not necessarily want to be in, what does faithful waiting look
like?

Two things:

We have an opportunity to look within ourselves.
To take a long and honest look at what lies below the surface.

So much of what lies below the surface can come out when we
wait, when we're forced to stay where we are...

A few years ago, Craig Barnes wrote an intriguing piece about
Ernest Hemingway.

“Ernest Hemingway was injured in World War I while working as
an ambulance driver. Doctors pulled 237 pieces of shrapnel out of his
body, and he spent six months in a hospital ward recovering. He was
surrounded by other patients recovering from their wounds and became
fascinated by how differently they waited through the seemingly endless
days of recovery.

“Some distracted themselves with small entertainments,

others cried out in lament,
and still others pondered the depths of their lives.

“It may have been during this time that [Hemingway] figured out plotlines that depicted a lead character waiting for combat to begin, or waiting for a bull to start charging, or waiting for rescue at sea.

“Hemingway’s thesis is that the waiting does not break us;
it reveals us.”¹

Waiting reveals us?
I think that’s true.

When we are forced to stay here, wherever here is,
it can teach us something about ourselves.

It can show us whether we’re patient or impatient.
Whether we’re afraid or at peace.

It can show us the ways that we need to grow...ways we might never see if we’re always ON THE MOVE.

Did you know that one of the biblical roots of the word “wait” is “to stretch”...²

Waiting reveals who we are.

But according to Scripture, waiting also reveals **WHO GOD IS...**

If the disciples had NOT waited, if they had sprinted off to the ends of the world on their own...do you think they would have succeeded? They wouldn’t have been around on Pentecost, when God

¹ “What Waiting Reveals About Our True Selves,” by Craig Barnes, *The Christian Century*, November 4, 2016.

² As noted in “Wait,” a sermon by Edmund Steimle, in his collection of sermons *From Death to Birth*, Fortress Press, 1973.

sent the Holy Spirit to them. They had to wait on God...to give them what they needed.

Speaking in different languages on Pentecost—it was a gift they never saw coming.

Many times, the same is true for us...we need to wait on God for a gift that none of us see coming...

I once heard a colleague describe the day long ago,
when he was a teenager,
when he decided to leave home.

“I grew up in an abusive and alcoholic environment,” he said.

“On the night in question, I decided that I had had enough. Like most children of alcoholics, I thought I was the problem, and that if I would leave, my family would be okay...so I left.

I ran away.
[But] like most 14-year-olds,
I really didn't think this whole thing through.

I left with the clothes I was wearing, my wallet,
[money]...from my paper route
and my book bag.”

He said he made it about a mile on his trusty Schwinn 10-speed bike when he stopped in an alley behind a mall.

He sat down on some crates.
Then he broke down and cried.
What was there left to do?

After a few minutes, he checked his wallet...
and there, **folded up next to the money was a card.**

“I had taken it quickly one day and jammed it in my wallet and forgot all about it,” he said. “The card was like one I got every week [for two years] from a youth leader at [my] Presbyterian Church.

I never went to the [youth] meetings.
As I looked at the card, at the bottom,
Mike [the leader] had hand-written a note to me.”

The note said:

“I really hope you can join us one of these weeks.”
He signed it, “your friend, Mike.”

And there under Mike’s signature was a phone number.

My colleague said he didn’t know what else to do,
so he went to the nearest payphone and called the number.

“When I told Mike who I was
and what had happened,
I will never forget when he asked me, “Where are you?”

I told him and he [said], “Stay put, I will be right there.”

Mike came, and Mike was with him.
Not just that day, but in the months ahead.
Mike got him into Al-Anon and counseling,
Mike encouraged him and held him accountable...

And that 14-year-old boy LISTENED.

He, who got the short end of the stick with his family, ended up not with a new family, but with a new life...all because the youth leader at his church stuck with him.

All because Mike said to that 14-year-old...

I'm STAYING.

I'm seeing you through.

I'm curious what the Holy Spirit will

do with you...

I know that many of us are in a place right now we would rather not be. As you wait for things to change, let me encourage each of you to LISTEN for that voice!

The voice that says:

I'm right here with you.

I'm seeing you through.

It's the voice of the living God.

You don't have to be running away from home to hear that voice.

When all this waiting that we're doing right now is done,
what is the Holy Spirit going to do...with you?

Amen.