

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**ASCENSION SUNDAY**  
**REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON**  
**“WAITING WITH A SENSE OF EXPECTANCY”**  
**Acts 1:12-14**  
**May 4, 2008**  
**8:45 & 11:00 A.M. Services**

Everyone in the world is waiting for something. Because we are creatures of time, we have little control over the timing of things. Creation itself is regulated to time. The ground is prepared, the seeds are planted, but then, because growth takes time, it is necessary to wait for the harvest.

Waiting can be the hardest work in the world. If we are waiting for something we want, our anticipation keeps us on pins and needles. If we are waiting for something we fear, our dread or anxiety keeps us preoccupied. Still, life demands that we wait. Patience is possible through our faith that God is in our future, whatever comes.

Patience is becoming a lost art. Waiting has always been difficult, but our technological age has programmed us to expect everything to happen instantly. Waiting is less and less necessary. Pizza is delivered to your home faster than you can spell “**mozzarella.**” We are not good at waiting. Jesus once asked his disciples to wait. He was leaving them, returning to the Father, but he wanted them to wait in Jerusalem until they received “**power from on high.**” (Lk 24:49) The disciples did as they were instructed. Today’s verses from Acts 1 tell us about their waiting. Perhaps we can learn from them some lessons in waiting.

The New Testament book of Acts was written by Luke, as was the Gospel that bears his name. Luke was a physician and a fellow traveler with Paul on his missionary journeys. Also, he was apparently a Gentile convert to Christianity. The Gospel of Luke tells the story of Jesus’ life and ministry, including his death and resurrection. The book of Acts tells the story of the Church that carries on the life of Christ, and specifically how the Church was empowered to do this.

When Jesus had ascended into heaven the disciples returned to Jerusalem, to their upper room, to wait there until they were empowered to carry out their mission. Acts 1 tells us the names of some who were there. It also tells us that the larger number of Jesus' disciples was about 120. Waiting is especially difficult to do alone. The disciples did their waiting together, which was surely a source of strength and encouragement. They became a waiting community.

When we must wait - - by the bedside of a desperately ill loved one, or by the phone when we don't know if the news will be good or bad, or in any other uncertain situation - - it helps enormously if we are not waiting alone. Ambrose Bierce, in his *Devil's Dictionary*, defined patience as "**a minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.**" Having someone share our difficult times of waiting will ease the despair and will strengthen us for whatever comes. If possible, it is best not to wait alone.

The disciples not only waited together, but "***they devoted themselves with one accord to prayer.***" Henri Nouwen correctly pointed out that we moderns consider waiting to be wasted time, or empty time. Yet if God is not in our waiting, where is God? Waiting makes us nervous, irritable, even anxious. "**True waiting,**" said St. Francis de Sales, "**means waiting without anxiety.**" Waiting patiently involves the recognition that all forms of healing take time. Biblical faith has always known that "***those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.***" (Is 40:31) Waiting, therefore, is an ideal time for praying.

George MacDonald, whom C. S. Lewis considered his spiritual "**master,**" said that "**the principal part of faith is patience.**" Spiritual growth is a long journey, and there are no shortcuts. We must wait to receive some things. This is not merely a concession to time. It is the recognition that some things can only be received in the stillness and passivity of waiting. When we must wait, praying may be the most important way to spend our time. What is more appropriate to the waiting person than to pray for understanding, for strength, for the willingness to do God's will? When is prayer as listening more appropriate than when we are waiting? Pray while you wait. Still better, let your waiting be a prayer.

What do you suppose was the mood of the disciples after Jesus' ascension, and as they returned to the upper room? Jesus had left them.

Even their last visible contact with him had ended. They must have been very sad. They must have been really worried about the future. To the contrary, Luke's Gospel tells us ***“they returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple blessing God.” (24:52-53)*** Why? Because they recognized that a new age was about to begin, and because they anticipated their own future as Christ's ***“witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Ac 1:8)*** In their days of waiting, the disciples found strength in being together and in praying together, but they also nurtured their sense of expectancy about the future.

The disciples had good reason to be full of expectancy. The book of Acts demonstrates how Christianity triumphed by breaking through the religious, racial, and national limitations that some tried to impose on it. The last word in Acts is ***“unhindered,”*** which epitomizes the message of the book. Through the faith and courage of Christ's followers the gospel was set free, and, ***“unhindered,”*** was carried to the ends of the earth.

Patience is the art of hoping. Waiting, for the Christian, means living in hope. What hope? It is the great hope that ultimately, in the fullness of God's time, the purposes of God in Christ will be fulfilled. A dramatic example of eager expectancy takes place in birds' nests in the spring. Baby birds have become involved in the most intense kind of waiting you have ever seen. They are waiting a parent to bring them food. Look in the nest, and all you see are mouths! They are straining upward, and are trembling and making all the racket they can. This is expectancy!

***“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Co 2:9)***

Christian faith is not positive-thinking, yet it has a profoundly positive dimension. Neither is faith fatalistic, as if the future is hopelessly fixed. Our faith is in God who is present in all that happens to us and around us. In Romans 8, Paul says that ***“in all things God works for good with those who love him.”*** In whatever comes, God is at work in our circumstances to bring about something redemptive. It may not be what we wanted, but it will be something God can use for our ultimate good.

If you believe that God's will for you is good, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.