

5/19/24-Pentecost Sunday

Teacher: Melissa Logsdon

Teaching Title: Waiting on God's Presence

Scripture on Front of Bulletin: Acts 2:1 TPT

On the day Pentecost was being fulfilled, all the disciples were gathered in one place.

Key Passages

Exodus 3 & 13, Leviticus 23, Numbers 9 & 11, Acts 1 & 2

INTRODUCTION: WAITING

Waiting is hard. It's probably the least favorite state to be in.

Some fun facts, ok not so fun facts about waiting:

- According to a 2023 survey by Waitwhile, collectively people in the United States spend about 37 billion hours a year waiting in line.
- On average, Americans wait: 20 minutes a day for the bus or train
- 32 minutes whenever they visit a doctor
- 28 minutes in security lines whenever they travel
- 21 minutes for a significant other to get ready to go out
- 13 hours annually waiting on hold for a customer service
- 38 hours each year waiting in traffic
- The average person throughout their lifetime spends five years waiting in lines and queues where roughly six months of that is waiting at traffic lights.

And these statistics only scrape the surface of the waiting times in our lives. How can we even start to count all the other "waiting rooms" of life? Waiting for a life partner, waiting for kids, waiting for the job, retirement, reconciliation, test results, treatment outcomes, financial security, healing of body, mind, soul. Time drags at a horribly slow pace in these times. In times of waiting, we have ample time to grow restless, become agitated, worry, reflect and conjure up the worst case scenarios for our current situation and imagine a fear-full future.

So, when reading Acts 1 & 2, I wonder what it was like for the disciples when Jesus asked them to stay put and WAIT for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I wonder if they recalled what scriptures had revealed about God and prophesied about a future with God's Spirit at work among the people of God. Or, if they worried. If they worried about the situation currently around them, and the consequences they would face in the future—if and when they openly claimed alliance with Jesus' way of living life (which was a direct threat to the ruling powers of their region).

The people of God have had a long history of waiting. Waiting for God to come through for them in times of displacement, subjugation, prejudice and slavery. In the book of Exodus, we read of God rescuing the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt. God then goes on to set them up as an organized people group providing guidance for their society, their personal lives, and their corporate worship experience. We have records in the books of Leviticus and Numbers of this formation, but it can become a bit cumbersome to read through it all. Especially when the customs of their time don't make sense in our time and place. So it can be easy to just glide through these books and miss some nuggets of how God's presence was revealed to the Israelites then, in their times of waiting and uncertainty, and how God provided for them. But, if we mine out this gold, it can help us make more sense of the account in Acts 1 & 2 and help us make more sense of God's work in our lives today, especially when we find ourselves in places of waiting.

REMEMBERING

In the books of Leviticus and Numbers we find God commanding the people to mark on their calendars specific days to remember God's faithfulness and to celebrate how God has and does provide for the people of God. In our church calendar, we have landed on one of those days—Pentecost. For the past 50 days, we have journeyed from Passover to Feast of First Fruits and Feast of Weeks. A season of remembering God's salvation of a people in slavery in Egypt (with Moses leading the way out nearly 4000 years ago), to marking a season of remembering God's salvation of a people in slavery to sin and death (with Jesus leading the way out nearly 2000 years ago). This is a time to remember and rejoice in God's presence and provision for the people of God.

Leviticus 23:10, 15-16, 20-21 NIV

[10] "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.

[15] "'From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. [16] Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord.

[20] The priest is to wave the two lambs before the Lord as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the Lord for the priest. [21] On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live."

I believe God knew that people are prone to busy-ness and forgetfulness and that forgetting how God has provided leads to anxiety and despair. We NEED to remember to keep hope alive in the midst of the heartaches and struggles in life. And we need help

remembering to remember. So today is a gift—one such day to pause and to remember and to celebrate God’s goodness, not just for us today, but the countless ways God’s chesed/steadfast love toward the people of God has been evidenced throughout the centuries.

WAITING FOR THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In Acts 1 & 2 we read the account of Jesus promising the Holy Spirit to the disciples and their waiting for the promised empowering presence of God.

Acts 1:3-5, 8 NIV

[3] After his [Jesus’] suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. [4] On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. [5] For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

[8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 2:1-4 NIV

[1] When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Stepping back and looking at this moment in Acts within the grander narrative of the revelation of God’s presence and provision throughout history, I can’t help but wonder what I have been missing about this moment’s significance for the disciples then. And what implications it has for us today.

As we look back through scriptures, we can find many times when God’s presence was revealed in fire. On that day the early disciples were gathered together waiting for God’s Spirit. I’m curious if they would have remembered all these accounts, and realized in that moment the great significance of God’s presence resting as a flame of fire over each of their heads.

GOD’S PRESENCE IN FIRE

In Exodus, we read of Moses in a waiting room of sorts: tending sheep in the wilderness, hiding out from Pharaoh. And in that moment, God's presence is revealed to him in fire.

Exodus 3:1-17 NIV

[1] Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. [2] There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. [3] So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." [4] When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." [5] "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." [6] Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. [7] The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. [8] So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. [9] And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. [10] So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." [11] But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" [12] And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." [13] Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" [14] God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" [15] God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' "This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. [16] "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. [17] And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

In this God encounter, Moses comes into God's presence, God's name "I am who I am" is revealed, God acknowledges the cries of the people, calls Moses to a purpose to help in freeing the people, and tells of a good future for the people with an end to misery and a place of provision for them.

Later in Exodus, once the people are freed from Egypt, God leads the people forward with a constant comforting, protective, visible, presence of power and guidance.

Exodus 13:21-22 NIV

[21] "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. [22] Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people."

Once they establish the tabernacle as place to meet with and worship God, God's presence continues to be visible as a cloud of fire.

Numbers 9:15-23 NIV

[15] "On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. [16] That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. [17] Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. [18] At the Lord's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. [19] When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the Lord's order and did not set out. [20] Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the Lord's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. [21] Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. [22] Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. [23] At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."

Notice how the people waited on God's leading for when to stay put and when to set out. And how God's presence was stayed with them and guided them.

GOD'S SPIRIT Poured OUT

Then in Numbers 11 we see God's presence in the form of fire rest over the heads of individual people. In this narrative, the people are grumbling. Tired of waiting for the promised land, tired of the food that God has provided. Not only does God provide the meat they crave (which they are greedy with and hoard as if the God who provided it would not continue to be able to provide), but in the midst of this narrative, God also sends the power of the Spirit to the leaders to fill them with wisdom and witness God's character.

Numbers 11:16-18, 25-29 NIV

[16] "The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. [17] I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone. [18] "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The Lord heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the Lord will give you meat, and you will eat it.

[25] Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again. [26] However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. [27] A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." [28] Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" [29] But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

One thing I find fascinating in this God encounter, is that even the leaders that didn't come to meet with God were included in the gift of the Spirit. It seems like it was an unconditional pouring out not dependent on their worthiness.

And what I find sad, is that it was a one time experience in the moment. I wonder if it was because of the decision of greed and fear that the people demonstrated?

And I wonder if Moses' desire for all God's people to have the Spirit on them and able to speak God's heart is a prophecy of the coming outpouring that we see realized in Acts 2.

When Peter speaks to the crowd, he doesn't reference Moses's words, but he does reference the prophet Joel's words about the long waiting coming of the Spirit for all people.

Acts 2:16-18, 33 NIV

[16] "No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [33] Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

No doubt that if not prior to the pouring out, once they started to experience the empowering presence of God's Spirit, the disciples were able to articulate that this was what they had been waiting for all this time! Not just these 10 days between Act 1:8 and 2:4, but a much, much longer wait that Joel and Moses and many others had hoped for and prophesied would come.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GRATITUDE AND GENEROSITY

The early church with God's Spirit presence poured out on ALL of them, were empowered to live the lives God had always called them to: lives of gratitude and generosity.

In Leviticus 23 when God sets up these times to remember God's faithfulness and celebrate God's provision, God reminds them to care for the poor:

Leviticus 23:22 NIV

[22] "When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God."

And that is what we see God's people doing in Acts 2 after the outpouring of God's Spirit: Living lives of gratitude and generosity.

Acts 2:41-47 NIV

[41] "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. [42] They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. [43] Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. [44] All the believers were together and had everything in common. [45] They sold property and possessions

to give to anyone who had need. [46] Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

The result of God’s empowering presence in the early Christian community was what God had wanted for the people of God all along.

Conclusion: Us today

So, what will we do when we find ourselves in a time of waiting. With an uncertain future.

Will we be open to God’s Spirit’s work in and through us? Will it be short lived or enduring? When in our waiting, will we remember God’s faithfulness? When we arrive into a good place of peace and rest and fruitfulness, will we remember gratitude to God? Will we practice generosity trusting God will provide in the future too? Or will we hoard and think it’s all on us and God may not continue to come through for us?

Will we remember that the same God who, over thousands of years, continued to show up, speak, call, guide, provide, and comfort the people of God; will in fact show up for us, speak to us, call us, guide us, provide for us, and comfort us?

How reassuring that God’s Spirit continues to rest and empower imperfect people. I find it encouraging to realize the same Spirit rests on us, guides us, and is with us to give us wisdom today. We CAN live lives empowered by the Spirit to practice gratitude and generosity, EVEN in the waiting.

God, thank you for pouring out your Spirit on all people so we may live lives in fellowship with Your presence. Through your steadfast loving presence we can stay focused on you and live lives of gratitude for your goodness. As we abide in your provision, you set us free from fear so we can live lives filled with generosity. Thank you for this day to remember, and your steadfast presence with us. Amen.