

Embracing the Waiting  
Genesis 18:1-15; Romans 5:1-8

Rev. Kenneth M. Locke  
Interim Pastor, St Paul UCC, New Bremen, OH  
June 18, 2023; 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Do you wait well? Are you good at waiting? Is it second nature for you? If you have to wait in line at the store and the check-out person is rude, or if you have to wait on-hold for a bureaucrat for 15 minutes, are you gracious and kind? Unfailingly polite and considerate to all involved?

Or do you, perhaps, chafe against waiting? Does having to wait get you irritated, uptight, anxious?

Abraham and Sarah have had a lot of experience waiting; waiting for a son to be born. Last week, we read how Abraham was 75 years old and Sarah was not far behind. This week, Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah is not far behind. They've been waiting 25 years for this son.

Sarah seems to have given up. 'Come on, really? Who are you kidding? After my husband is so old, and I'm old, now I'm going to have the pleasure of bearing a child?' To be fair, Abraham may feel that way, too. We don't know. The text doesn't say. But we can certainly appreciate how either or both would be a bit snarky after waiting 25 years.

But the Lord makes the point, things happen in God's time. Things will happen in due time, when the time is right, in God's time. Until then, Abraham and Sarah do their part, but mainly they wait.

Waiting is something we all do. We wait until we're old enough to go to school like the big kids. We wait until we graduate and can get a real job. We eagerly wait to fall in love and find someone to spend our lives with. We wait for promotions. We can't wait for the kids to grow up and FINALLY leave home. We can't wait for the kids come back and visit. We can't wait until retirement when we can travel and do all those things we've been wanting to do.

But what are we doing while we're waiting? What are we doing while we're waiting for all these important things to happen? Are we waiting well?

Remember the early days of the Covid pandemic, when we were all under house arrest? Suddenly, we had all this time on our hands! We couldn't go anywhere or do anything but there was all this talk about learning classical guitar or studying a foreign language. Did you do that? Did you watch youtube videos on how to play an instrument or get a tape on studying a foreign language? I didn't. I thought about it. But I didn't do it.

Waiting is part of everyone's life and like most things in life we can do it badly or we can do it well. We don't know how long we're going to have to wait for something. Things happen when they're supposed to. In due season, what was longed for will arrive. But until then, it's up to us to use the time badly or use it well.

Let's look at Paul, a minute. Paul says we are justified. That is, we are right with God. Being justified means we are right with God. In Jesus' death and resurrection our sins are forgiven. This is God's gift to us. In Jesus, we are justified.

But being justified is only half the equation. We are right with God, but it doesn't end there. In loving thanks for the gift of justification, we respond by being more like God. We read our Bibles, learning what God wants from us. We pray for guidance and offer prayers of thankfulness for what God has done for us. We care for the powerless and comfort those who are in pain or sorrow. We seek justice for the oppressed and renewal for the environment. We live lives that are morally upright and mentor those who are young in faith.

Becoming more like God is called sanctification. In God's gift of justification we are made right with God. We lovingly respond with sanctification, becoming more like God. Living the godly lives God wants us to live.

Of course, we are never completely sanctified. We never become perfectly pure. We are sinful creatures and sin will continue to be a constant in our lives. But we can sin less and grow more and more like God. And often, it's the troubles in life that give us the opportunity to grow.

Let me share an example. For the last two week's I've been trying to get my health-insurance reinstated. It's nothing to do with us or the UCC. The screw-up has been on the Presbyterian side. The Presbyterian bureaucracy in charge of my health insurance has made some massive, massive screw-ups. I've been on the phone I

don't know how many times trying to fix it and every time I call the poor soul answering the phone has to ask me to verify my mailing address, my phone number, my e-mail, my date of birth and the last four of my social security number. I keep waiting for them to ask my blood type.

I think everything is straight now, but it's been really, really frustrating. Several times I've wanted to reach through the phone and strangle someone. That's when I have to stop and remind myself it's not their fault. They're just doing their job, asking the questions they're supposed to ask. I'm sure they're not the highest paid people there. Why take my frustrations out on them?

Instead, why not treat it as a chance for practicing patience? Practicing being calm? Being polite, friendly, gracious – maybe making their day a little better! It's a chance for asking 'what would Jesus do?' In a word, it's a chance for practicing sanctification. For being more like God. Waiting is like anything else. We can do it well or we can do it badly. I can come apart at the seams, or I can practice sanctification.

We, our church, are also in a time of waiting. We are waiting for a new, settled pastor. I've worked in enough interim positions to know it doesn't matter how fast we move, there is always someone telling us to move faster, we're taking too long, our church is dying and if we don't get a real pastor soon our church will be dead. Sometimes, the church panics and settles for the first warm body they can find.

But strong churches know this is a chance for waiting well. Strong churches know this is a chance for asking what kind of church God wants us to be. Are we experimenting with new forms of ministry? Is our committee structure still working for us? Are there missions we've done for years but which may need to be retired? Are there new missions we should explore? Are we spending time in prayer, listening for God's guidance? God is still speaking. Are we listening?

Are we as a church deliberately looking for ways to be more the church God wants us to be? Are we, as a church, simply marking time, twiddling our thumbs, so to speak? Or are we taking this chance to grow in sanctification? Are we waiting well?

Waiting, of course, does not make us immune to these hardships. They are still there, but while we are waiting, we know

we can face the hardships of life with peace and calm. While we are waiting, we know we can continue facing the troubles of life – the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to – we can face them with hope because we know facing the ups and downs of life will help us grow in faith. By facing the hardships of life with the hope of God we can become more and more like God, living more and more godly lives.

Friend, are you waiting for something? Are you busily waiting for something? Are you waiting for someone to love you as much as you love them? Are you waiting for news from the doctor? Have you had a profound loss and you're waiting for the grief to lessen so you can finally take charge of your life again? Are you waiting for something you know will change your life, but it just doesn't ever seem to happen? Do you maybe feel a bit like Abraham and Sarah?

These things happen when they happen. God has a calendar and a schedule but only God can read it and understand it. Our job is to wait.

While we are waiting, let's spend the time well. Let's spend our time in sanctification, becoming more and more the people God wants us to be. Not marching in place or twiddling our thumbs. Not anesthetizing ourselves with drugs, alcohol, too much television or even staying desperately busy, busy, busy.

Let's use the time well, embracing the joys and confronting the hardships of life, those slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Let's face them with hope. We are justified: our sins are forgiven, we are in right relationship with God.

Friends, let's spend our waiting time on sanctification, living godly lives. Caring for strangers, Bible study, prayer, generosity. Let's spend our time being more and more the people God wants us to be, knowing more and more the joy of being more and more like God. Amen.