

"Having to Wait"
Sermon for Ascension Sunday
Lectionary Year C
May 16, 2010
Text: Acts 1:1-11
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There are few things in life worse than having to wait. I was reminded of that fact Friday a week ago when our grandson, Henry, was staying with us. I had taken him to Walmart to pick out a video game to play on Stephanie's Wii system. He picked out the game version of the movie *How to Train Your Dragon*, which we took him to see a month or so ago. He was so excited about getting the game as one of his birthday presents, and he was most anxious to get home and begin playing it.

The only problem was that it is Stephanie's Wii system. That means I know nothing about making it work. Absolutely nothing. So Henry had to wait, and I had to wait with him, until Stephanie got home from school. "How long is it going to be before Mimi gets home?" asked Henry. "About fifteen minutes," I responded. "Fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes. That's a long, long time, Pop," sighed the forlorn little lad. And he was right. For a five year old who can't wait to play a new video game, one he picked out himself for his birthday, fifteen minutes is a long, long time. It can feel like an eternity.

Henry was in good company as it turns out. The disciples most likely felt exactly the same way when before Jesus ascended, he instructed them to go to Jerusalem and wait. No matter how badly they wanted to begin evangelizing, no matter how eager they were to begin telling other people about the life and work of Jesus, they were told they were not to get started right away. I imagine that their time of waiting, what Jesus described as "not many days from now," felt pretty much like Henry's agonizing fifteen minute wait for his grandmother. It seemed like a long, long time, an eternity even.

As it also turns out, both Henry and the disciples were waiting on basically the same thing, that is, the resources they needed in order to accomplish the task they wanted to do. For Henry, the resource was his Mimi, who had the knowledge and the experience to set up the system on which to play his game and who could offer him instruction on how to make it work. For the disciples, it was the Holy Spirit, who would empower them with all the resources they would need to spread the word of the good news of the gospel. As an aside, did you notice I just compared my wife to the Holy Spirit? I should get some style points for that.

Henry hasn't nearly mastered the *How to Train Your Dragon* game. It's pretty complicated, even for a five year old with exceptional intelligence. And it took the disciples a little time to get

the hang of relying on the Spirit to lead and guide them and provide them with all the gifts and graces they would need to become effective evangelists. There is no question that with those resources, the apostles turned the world upside down. They became powerful witnesses to God's love and grace made possible through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ lived out in the body of Christ, the church. That was the end result of the process, but the process itself began by needing to wait to be properly equipped.

You have heard me say before that *God never calls us to do anything for him that he doesn't adequately equip us to do*. God doesn't do the work he calls us to do for us, that is, he doesn't do it himself. He depends on us to do it, but he graciously gives us the tools we need to accomplish the task, whether we realize it or not. Many times, though, becoming adequately prepared requires waiting. In order to be who we need to be in order to serve God as he wants us to, we may need to wait.

We may need to wait in order to receive the necessary gifts and graces our service to God and others requires. The resources we need to be who God is calling us to be come in all shapes and sizes and differ from person to person. I'll give you an example that is on my mind and in my heart today. My daughter, Stephanie, is graduating from college today. She is thirty years old, which means that she could have

graduated from college several years ago. To the frustration of her parents and step-parents, she attended the University of Texas in Austin for four-and-a-half years—had a wonderful time in the sorority she pledged, had a wonderful time down on Sixth Street, and had a wonderful time working as a bartender at the Saltgrass Steakhouse—but never managed to get a degree. Forty thousand dollars got spent providing for all those wonderful times with nothing academically to show for them.

So she waited, and we waited along with her. Only after she got married and had a baby, did she decide she needed to go back to school and get her degree. She paid for it herself. And today she will receive from the University of Texas in Arlington a BBA in Accounting with a 4.0 GPA and an MS in Accounting with a 3.7 GPA. She has a job waiting for her at PricewaterhouseCoopers, where she did her internship. Needless to say, we are all very proud of her.

Apparently waiting was necessary for Stephanie. It was necessary so that she could discover a field about which she would become passionate, and neither she nor any of us who know her best could ever have imagined it would be accounting. It also seems that waiting was necessary in Stephanie's case so that she could be provided with the adequate amount of motivation to do what all of us knew she was capable of doing, and that motivation came in the form of the

world's greatest grandson, the aforementioned Henry. Sometimes we may need to wait for things because we need certain gifts and graces in order to do what God is calling us to do for others as our way of serving him.

It also is true that *we may need to wait in order to recognize the gifts and graces we already possess*. I remember when I was at Baylor and worked with a young man who was a charismatic Christian, raised in the Pentecostal faith tradition. I was greatly impressed by his knowledge of scripture and the boldness of his willingness to share his faith experience. He told me about a second baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that beyond water baptism, would allow me to possess the spiritual gifts of healing, prophecy, and most importantly, the gift of tongues. All of this was foreign to the tradition in which I was raised, so I was fascinated.

He gave me a book to read, a "how to" book that explained the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts that would accompany such an experience. At the end of the book was a prayer to use to receive this baptism and the gifts. I read the book and prayed the prayer . . . and nothing happened. I did it again, with no luck. I tried yet a third time and failed once more. Discouraged and upset, I went to see my pastor at the time, David Matthews, who wisely told me to

take heart and simply to wait. I would receive a word from God about this dilemma I was in.

Sure enough, a few weeks later, in a worship service at Seventh and James Baptist Church across from the Baylor campus, I heard God speak to me. He said in that still, small voice, "David, why are you asking for additional gifts to use to serve me, when you aren't utilizing in my service the ones I already have given you? Try putting those to use; utilize them to the very best of your ability. And if you need additional gifts and graces, I eagerly will supply them."

That word from God set me on a path that eventually led me here, to this place and this position. There still remained waiting that was necessary for me—waiting until I gained both the theological knowledge and the life experience I needed to help me to be an effective pastor.

What was true for me is true for you as well. You also are gifted and graced, even if you don't think you are. God may have insisted you wait in order for you to discover those talents and abilities he has given you. If you have discovered them and sought to nurture and strengthen them, it may now be the time for you to utilize them in your service to others for the glory of God.

Waiting is hard, but it may be necessary. It may be painful, but it may be required. God has perfect timing, and if we are attuned to

that timetable, we will be able to serve God as we should with the resources God has provided for us. The other side of this equation is true as well. If we get in a hurry, if we fail to wait, if we go ahead and try to force *our* timetable on God, the results may be disastrous. I can remember with a great deal of remorse more than one time in which I should have waited and didn't. I was impulsive and got ahead of God. Big mistake. Years of problems arose from my impatience. As the great theologian Elvis Presley once sang, "Wise men say only fools rush in . . ." As an aside, a woman in my congregation in Nocona once told me that any sermon that quoted Elvis automatically was a good one. So credit me with even more style points.

Having to wait is no fun, not at all. But it is even less fun to fail to wait and instead rush into things before we are adequately equipped—be those things marriage, parenthood, a career, a major transition in life. If we refuse to wait until it is the right time, God's time, we may be setting ourselves up for tragic consequences. Being willing to wait until we have the resources, the gifts and graces we need to be in service to God through our service to others, can bring forth a lifetime of joy and fulfillment. God's ways tend to work out to be in our best interest, and so does God's time, if . . . we . . . will . . . wait . . . for it.