

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, August 11, 2019**  
**Mike Ruggi**  
**Genesis 15:1-6 : Hebrews 11:1-3,8-16 : Luke 12:32-40**  
**Waiting For The Future**

One of the realities of life is waiting; waiting for someone to show up, waiting for a phone call to announce some news, waiting for a response to our texts, waiting for things to change. Another reality of life is that most of us do not like waiting. We look for the shortest lines at the grocery store and other public places. Yet another reality is that we become impatient, even angry, while waiting. How often do we complain about the waiter who is slow or inattentive, and about the car in front of us to be served at Tim Hortons? Not to mention how we behave when stuck in traffic. In my case, the fuse only lasts 10 minutes before the explosion happens.

Sometimes it seems like we are always waiting for the future. As children we wait for Christmas, summer vacation, and to get older so we can sit at the grown-up table. As adults we wait for just the right job, that special someone who will make our life complete, the promotion we worked for, for me, it was retirement. Some people wait for the diagnosis, others for a cure. Some wait for the day the pain will stop and the grief will end. Others wait for the answer to their prayers. Many of us wait for that day when we have enough time, enough money, enough freedom, and we will live happily ever after. Sometimes it seems as if the world has waited from the beginning of creation for peace, and the end of war, hunger, and poverty.

At some level waiting takes place every day. Each of us could name the things or people for which we wait. Sometimes we live with the overwhelming feeling of waiting but with no clear idea of what we are waiting for.

And when we are waiting, we generally don't wait in the present. We either move into the past remembering the moments in our lives that made a significant impact on us, both good and bad. Or we move into the future where we dream of things to come. Things we can be doing instead of waiting. The great tragedy is that in doing so we lose the present moment. That's part of what makes waiting so painful and difficult.

Everyone, everywhere, in every age waits. Jesus does not eliminate waiting. If anything, it sounds like just the opposite. He tells the crowd, "Be like those waiting for their master to return."

But today's gospel is not, however, simply about passing time. It is about presence and being present. Jesus sees waiting as an act of faithfulness; the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. He's inviting us to be present to the One who is already present. He's inviting us to listen for the knock, to watch, and to be alert. He's inviting us to be present to the reality of God in each other, in the world, and in ourselves. This is the God who is present in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, even in our waiting.

All of this, Jesus says, happens at an unexpected hour. Like a thief in the night the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour, so have the lamps lit and be alert.

So, when is the unexpected hour? When will all this happen? Well, my guess is that for most of us, maybe all of us, the most unexpected hour is today, right here, right now. But for me it was over 17 years ago when I went to the Princeton Youth Forum.

It was at evensong, when I found myself praying, really praying, for the first time. For most people, praying comes naturally but up to this point, for me, praying was repeating the Lord's Prayer. I didn't know how to pray or perhaps I was afraid to, especially in public. That night I found myself talking to God openly. The words came automatically, and I was finally able to open my heart to Him. This coupled with what happened the next morning changed my whole life.

At worship that morning, I sat in a pew that overlooked a flowering tree outside the window. As the service proceeded, I happened to be looking out at the tree where I saw the figure of a man with arms stretched towards me, inviting me towards him. Although the image disappeared after a few moments, I knew it was the figure of Jesus. From that moment on I knew that he would always be at my side. I no longer had to wait for the future, it was here; Jesus had come back to earth for me. God had delivered me from evil and prepared me for His Kingdom. My faith had been shaken to its core, but in a good way. What solidified this feeling was that the sermon topic was about faith and that faith is not just about having, it is also about doing.

All sorts of people did things by faith. Noah built an ark before the rains fell. Enoch, who was so holy that he didn't die, he just took a walk and ended up in heaven. Abraham, who picked up lock, stock and barrel and moved just because God said go. Moses, one of the greatest figures in the Old Testament, the one who did God's greatest work, led the people out of Egypt towards an unknown land promised by God. Joshua, lead the people across the Jordan, and caused the walls of Jericho to fall using trumpets instead of weapons. And the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

All these examples remind us of a God that upsets our neat predictable lives. This God doesn't go to just the nice, friendly, church-going religious folk. This is a God who reaches out to a prostitute inside an enemy city and invites her to become part of the people of God. This is a God who takes a tax collector in the Temple and teaches him how to pray. This is a God who shows a thief on a cross that he is forgiven.

God wants all us to live in His kingdom even the prostitutes, the tax collectors and the thieves. He wants people who are willing to stand for what is right even though it may be unpopular, those willing to oppose the popular prejudice that what is different is automatically wrong or bad, those willing to give of one's time and one's love to people, to the right cause, to prayer. Maybe as I've been speaking you've been thinking of people who fit this description, although

they might well deny it if you approach them with it. They have learned that to have friends you must show yourself as friendly. To receive love, you must give it. They have learned that you don't have to be self-centred, pushy, and only looking out for yourself to get to the top. They have embraced Jesus' truth, that to keep your life you have to lose it and that it's only through Christ that you gain eternal life. They have the belief in what you hope for and certainty in what you cannot see. They know that you get more from giving than receiving.

“Be not afraid little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be Also.”

The Apostle Thomas took this statement from Jesus to heart. A story is told in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas in which Jesus sends Thomas to India where he was employed by the local king Gundaphorus to build him a new palace. Thomas was given a great deal money to buy materials and hire workmen. However, Thomas gave the money to the poor, but always assured the king that his palace was rising steadily. The king became suspicious when Thomas kept putting off his requests to see the work in progress and finally sent for Thomas. "Have you built my Palace?", he asked.

"Yes", Thomas replied.

"Then we shall go and see it now" said the King.

Thomas answered: "You cannot see it now, but when you depart this life you shall see it. I have built you a palace in heaven by giving your money to the poor and needy of your kingdom."

The king, of course, had Thomas thrown into prison, and vowed that the apostle would suffer at his hands.

In the meantime, the king's brother Gad had become deathly ill and died. The king loved his brother, and with great sorrow made preparations to mourn him. However, as they were putting the burial-clothes on his body, Gad revived. The king was overjoyed and ran to his side.

Then Gad said, "Brother, sell me your palace in the heavens."

The king was very puzzled by this and asked, "How could I have a palace in the heavens?"

Then Gad told him that when he died, his soul was carried by angels up to the heavens, where they showed him many palaces. At length they approached to one that was particularly beautiful, and Gad had begged the angels to let him live in even the humblest room of this beautiful palace. But the angels shook their heads, saying he could not dwell in that building. It had been built by Thomas for his brother. Then Gad had asked them to let him return to his brother in order to buy the palace from him. And they let him return for this very purpose.

Then Gundaphorus said to his brother, "Brother, it is not in my power to sell you that particular palace. But if you wish to buy such a palace, it is in my power to give you the means to buy it."

So, Thomas was set free in order to build a palace for God, just like the one he had built for Gundaphorus. The two brothers became Christians and devoted much of their lives to relieving the poor in their dominion; for it is of such stewardship that the best palaces are made

So, let's not wait for the future to begin to build our castle. Let's not wait to forgive. Let's not wait to visit the sick. Let's not wait to give to the poor. Let's not wait to begin that special project that God is gifting us with. Let's not wait to start thinking better about other people. Let's not wait before we adjust our attitude about life. Let's walk with Christ, trust God and do what the Spirit urges us to do in the depths of our hearts. Let's enjoy the treasures in heaven, even while on earth. Let's become the people God call us to be.

As Julia sang this morning:

I don't know about tomorrow, I just live from day to day  
I don't borrow from its sunshine, For its skies may turn to grey.  
I don't worry o'er the future, For I know what Jesus said.  
And today I'll walk beside him, For he knows what is ahead.  
Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand,  
But I know who holds tomorrow, And I know who holds my hand.

Thanks be to God. Amen.