

Hurry Up and Wait
Acts 9:1-6; John 21:15-19
Sunday, May 1, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

I once spent nearly four hours waiting to see a doctor. He was an ears, nose and throat specialist and I was recovering from surgery. Sometime soon after I arrived for my checkup, the patient he was currently seeing suddenly started to bleed from his nose and they couldn't stop it, so it became this big emergency, and the patient ultimately was taken to a hospital. Getting to his doctor's office was challenging. It required a bus ride plus nearly an hour on the subway, then a walk for a few blocks to get to his office. Trying to be on time, I left early and hustled to get there without knowing how long I would wait. He later apologized for the delay and the examination went well. Everybody has this story in some form or another. You have to hurry to arrive at an appointment or an event on time only to have to wait or wait in line. It happens all the time. In one of the stranger events in Scripture, Saul, the persecutor of the new religion, is stopped dead in his tracks and then told to wait.

- Set the stage

The first martyr of the church was Stephen the Deacon, who was stoned not far from the Garden of Gethsemane. Guarding the coats of the murderers was a rabbinical student named Saul, who was in full support of his murder. In fact, Saul became a dangerous persecutor of the church himself, and gained letters of support from the high priests in Jerusalem to show to the synagogues of Damascus to arrest any Christians there to bring them back to Jerusalem, presumably to meet the same fate as Stephen. Just as he approaches Damascus, he is struck down by a blinding light and confronted by Jesus. Unable to see and devastated to discover that he is on the wrong side of divine will, he is led by the hand into Damascus and told to wait.

- Waiting is not always wasting

Application: John 21:15-19 gives us some things to do while we wait, because waiting (cf. Isaiah 40:31 does not necessarily mean sitting still)

I think much of our lives is done in a sort of waiting. In addition to all the time we must wait for something or someone, there is a sense of waiting during the entirety of our days on earth. We await the day when we see Christ face to face, or for His return. We are expected to live each day with a certain sense of expectation. But waiting is not necessarily passive. One of the more famous passages about waiting is Isaiah 40:31, which says "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." The word for "wait" in the original language is an old word, meaning "to bind together" or "collect". It came also to symbolize expectation, gathering together, waiting, or waiting on someone. So, there is this sense of being quiet and still, alone and together, and also waiting upon someone like a household servant. It is both quiet and reflective and active in service. All of that is in the concept of waiting upon the Lord. For the Apostle Paul in his distress, waiting was probably sitting still and praying, but waiting also means to be active in service while awaiting the presence of the Lord. By the way the phrase, "mount up with wings like eagles" describes the work of God in delivering Israel from four centuries of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 19:4) The implication for us is that He will give us what we need when we need it. But back to the idea that waiting can be both active and passive

- Jesus has breakfast with Peter in John 21

After Jesus appeared to His disciples in John 20, which took place in Jerusalem, they apparently left and went back to their old jobs in Galilee. That was location when Jesus appeared to them with breakfast by the shore. During the conversation He speaks with Peter to feed and tend to His sheep which gives us the understanding that caring for each other, teaching and learning together, and seeing to the needs of each other are specific examples being active while waiting. One of the best ways to serve Christ is to serve each other, and like the message from last week's sermon, such service is commonplace but has a sacred nature to it that we often overlook. It was the same Savior that said that whatever we do for the least of His brethren, we have done to Him.

- Conclusion

In conclusion, Saul, before he became the Apostle Paul, approached the city of Damascus intending to arrest and kill every Christian he can find. What he found instead was Jesus, who knocked him off his mule and turned his world upside down. Then He told him to go into town and wait. He is not so dramatic with us, but He tells us to wait as well, to wait in quiet reflection, to wait by living our days in expectation, and to wait by serving each other, which is a profound way of serving Him.