

WAITING FOR THE NEXT BEST THING

Communion Sunday

Mark 1:1-8 & Isaiah 40:1-11

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The holiday season means it is time to wait in line. We wait in line at the store for the myriad of gifts we must buy. We wait in line in traffic from one busy store to the next. We wait with anticipation for the arrival of family and the opening of gifts. But what if there was something bigger and better that deserves our waiting? In the Gospel of Mark we hear about John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord. In Isaiah we read the prophecy of God's people being comforted. What has you waiting?

~Waiting in Line~

We have entered the season of waiting. The lines at the store have doubled and tripled. It would also seem that the general population's patience has also decreased by the same amount! Have you ever wondered how much time we waste waiting? I have, and usually these are the thoughts I ponder while I impatiently wait in line!

One website I came across had some of the following figures. The site first suggests that an average American in his/her lifetime spends 23,214 hours waiting while washing clothes. Often that is waiting on the dryer to finish while your newly clean clothes sit sopping wet in the washer ready to dry. They next suggest that we spend 20 weeks on hold. That's a whole lot of time listening to muzak and recorded messages that assure you that "you are valued as a person and someone will be with you shortly." We then spend an average of 6 months waiting in line. I'm guessing this might be doubled or tripled for me...or at least feels like it should be. I have a knack for always picking the wrong line. They then go on to suggest that we spend approximately 11 years in front of the Television. These hours, weeks, months, and years are time lost to the void that we will never get back.

The waiting seems to only follow us like an annoying sibling who knows exactly how to push our buttons. Lines at the store accompany lines at the gas station pump. Lines at the post office, UPS, or FedEx store accompany the added traffic because there are more cars on the road and the Holidays seem to be the best time to do any type of road construction! And it seems, just like that annoying sibling, the more we fight it the more we feel its sting! Is all the waiting worth it? Time is precious. Do we really want to spend it here?

~Waiting by the River~

I wonder if there were any people like me waiting in line by the river in the wilderness where John was baptizing. This crazy man who preferred the wilderness, had a questionable fashion sense, and an even more questionable diet was causing quite the uproar. We learn from him though that he was not the end, but pointed to another who would come. He proclaimed that he was preparing the way and calling people to repentance.

We learn from John's words that he is claiming to be a part of a much longer season of waiting. He quotes the words from the prophet Isaiah to describe his purpose. Isaiah spoke these words long before John's birth. The very people in line to set foot into the river were waiting long before that particular day. Generations had passed in

waiting...Waiting for the promises of God...Waiting for their future hope...Waiting for the Messiah...Waiting for things that had strayed way off course to be corrected and set right.

Long before John the Baptizer called the people to the river in the wilderness, Isaiah proclaimed the hope of ultimate peace in God. Indeed one would come more powerful than John...more powerful than Isaiah. They merely needed to prepare their hearts for His coming and wait.

~Why Wait?~

Waiting is often something we labor to circumvent, not embrace. In the day and age of instant access to information through the Internet, instant access to people through cell phones, instant live-streaming video & movies, instant coffee, instant gratification, and instant everything, we are not prone to wait. But could there be power in the waiting?

Marketers would suggest there is power in the waiting. The power of waiting is anticipation and expectation. We have entered the holiday movie season and with your popcorn and blockbuster will come a healthy dose of movie trailers. Trailers have already been released for movies not due to theaters until well into next year. Trailers exist for one purpose: to build anticipation and excitement for the movie. The talk of the Internet right now is the new Star Wars movie trailer. This short few minute clip that is merely several scenes of a few seconds each of footage stitched together are being replayed and analyzed. You can guarantee that lines will form early for its December 2015 release.

BUT the marketers didn't invent the power of waiting. They are merely tapping into a reality built into our very nature and ingrained in our genetics. Consider with me a moment pregnancy as a season of waiting. I am certainly not speaking as someone who has ever carried a baby to term (I have a profound respect for women and the process of childbirth), but let's imagine the alternative. You conceive one night and wake up the next with a baby! That would be shocking! Pregnancy allows for growth to occur, and not just inside the womb. The preparations and growth also begin as the parents-to-be get ready for the changes...and lack of sleep that will accompany this new child. During our pregnancy with Micah, I learned the power of nesting. You know what I'm talking about? That urge an expecting mother has to get ready for the new life that will emerge. This urge usually manifests in the need to prepare the nursery. It is a natural urge to get ready, to prepare the way!

~Embracing the Waiting~

Many generations have long since passed since those days with John the Baptist and we stand in a different point of time with a new perspective, but a similar hope. While we stand in the promises and hope of a Savior already born so many years ago, we continue to wait for His second coming. While we celebrate that we have been made holy through not only His birth, but life, death, and resurrection, we still live in a world not fully changed. So we wait.

We wait not with idle hands and calloused hearts...we wait with anticipation and expectation. We look to our own lives and prepare the way of the coming of Christ. How might we prepare the way for Christ in our hearts this Advent and Christmas? For one day true peace will embrace all the earth.

The holidays always seem to be about the "next best thing". The next best thing is not a product that can be bought or sold. The best thing is a God who would reach down from the very heavens to show us love...true love...and promises to do it again!