

Easter 7B  
Acts 1:15-17, 21-20  
"Waiting"

St. Luke's Episcopal  
May 15-16  
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Waiting is not something we humans do very well. As we home schooled our grandchildren for a few months last fall, we witnessed this. We began each day with devotions simplified for a five and a seven-year old. We started by looking at the church calendar. They were invited to share the day of the week and the date. Then one of them circled it. Next, we asked who would like to share what they were thankful for that day. (It had to be something new each day). But then inevitably the seven-year old moved quickly to the future. "How many days to - Halloween?...Thanksgiving?...Christmas?"

You may have heard the story about the man who was talking with God and asked, "Is it really true that with you one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day?" And God said, "Yes." The man says, "Then it follows that for you a million dollars must be like one dollar...Would you please give me a million dollars?" And God said, "Just a minute."

Getting older doesn't necessarily improve our tolerance for waiting. Our whole culture has a long history of instant gratification. Since the early days of radio and then television, we have been bombarded with innumerable "must haves." Now children daily discover new wants on their iPads.

The good news about our waiting, according to II Peter, is that "the Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient" with us. Jesus told his disciples that he would send the promise of his father upon them. But they must wait.

Learning to wait is an art of maturity. And even then; it doesn't come easily. Just consider how eager all of us are for this pandemic to be over--for life to return to some semblance of normalcy. We all want to reach the time when masks are no longer needed, where the landscape of our lives looks familiar once again.

Jesus' Disciples had been told by Jesus, "Behold, I send the promise of my father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high." In other words, "Wait." They were told to wait with no clear expectation of when this would happen.

His crucifixion had turned upside down their understanding of what sort of leader he was. Then, just as they might have descended into gloom; he began appearing to them. But now he was risen and transformed and they did not know how this would affect their relationship with him.

All of the disciples had journeyed with Jesus on his way to the cross. All of them had witnessed his teachings, had seen him heal the sick, the blind and the lame. They were his eyewitnesses.

A crowd of believers of about one hundred and twenty had assembled when Peter stood up and said, "Friends, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus--for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry."

Peter continues to say a replacement must be found-but it must be someone who was with them from the beginning, starting with the baptisms of John until the day of His Resurrection. Why? Because of the power of first-hand accounts: "I saw him with my own eyes," vs. : "I heard that this Jesus..." An eyewitness is much more convincing.

But first they were told they must wait. Then, having proposed two believers who met the criteria, they prayed: "Lord, you know everybody's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen." They were counting on the Lord to guide them.

It is generally believed that it was Peter who selected the two candidates: Joseph, called Barsabbas, and Matthias. So, step one is "Wait." Step two is "Pray." Step three was to "Cast lots." But before the choice was made, they prayed to "the Lord," presumably to Jesus, that he would guide them in their selection. You may not know this, but this is the first record of corporate oral prayer in the New Testament!

The practice of casting lots is still used in some churches today. It involves putting stones with names written on them in a vessel which was then shaken until one stone fell out.

Wait, pray, cast lots, and then what? Then disciples knew only what Jesus had told them, that they were to "stay in the city until you are clothed with the power from on high." And the really interesting question facing the disciples at that time was this: How would Jesus have us wait? Anxiously? Certainly, but not impatiently. I doubt that. My sense is that Jesus would have his disciples look forward joyfully to the time when they would be clothed with the power from on high. After all, they had God's promise conveyed to them by Jesus! What more could anyone ask?

We find ourselves in a somewhat similar time of transition of leadership in this church. We bid farewell two weeks ago to Pierre and Sophie and their family with a mixture of sadness and joy for them in their journey. But now, we, like those early disciples, must wait--until Pentecost when, once again we will be blessed and clothed with the Holy Spirit, just as they were. We must wait. And we must pray that God's will be done in our call process. Yes, God's will--not ours! We must not presume that any of us know God's will for us.

A Search Committee will be formed and their journey will be one of prayer and discernment. Their process will include listening and trusting in God's leading them. This step in leadership transition is called Trust. That's what THEY did. That's what we must do. Wait, pray, "draw lots," (or rather, discern), and trust.

Waiting and trusting is always the hardest part for congregations. We want what we want when we want it. You may have heard this prayer for patience. It goes like this: "Lord give me patience ....And I want it right now!"

We must learn to wait until the right time--God's time. Our task is learning to wait in joyful expectation. That means that we must let go of our own human expectations, allow God's Holy Spirit to move as God wills it, and simply trust in the words of Jesus, "I will be with you until the end of the Age." Amen.