

Sermon 3.27.16

Pastor Josh Ferris

Easter Sunday, Year C

Acts 10:34-43 | 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 | **Luke 24:1-12**

“The waiting is the hardest part.” That’s what Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers sang all the way back in 1981. He probably wasn’t the first to say it, and he certainly wasn’t the first to *experience* it, but Tom Petty was right: the waiting is the hardest part.

Recently it’s felt like my whole life is about *waiting*.

For nine months Annie now and I have been waiting to meet our daughter. The due date is tomorrow (I don’t know who planned that), and the waiting has become almost unbearable. Every text, every phone call, every time Annie calls my name, I think, “this is it! The wait is over!” But it’s not, and the waiting is the hardest part.

For the past few weeks I’ve been waiting with a family around a hospital bed. Waiting for doctors and answers, waiting for their loved one to die. It’s been an emotional roller coaster, and a few days ago, one of the members of the family – who probably isn’t a Tom Petty fan but who know it’s true – they said, “Pastor, it’s the waiting that’s the hardest part.”

Waiting is a part of life that we all experience, and often it *is* the hardest part. Waiting to find out whether or not we’ll keep our job. Waiting for news from the doctor. Waiting for direction and guidance. Waiting to see if the relationship will be repaired, if the problem will be solved, if things will go back to normal, waiting to see if the child is going to make the right choice. Waiting for a decent sermon idea, because it’s Friday now, and Easter is coming, and please, oh please, give me some inspiration God.

We all wait. Sometimes we wait alone, and sometimes we wait together. Right now we're all waiting to see what's going to happen with all this terrorism in our world, because it's scary. We're all waiting to see what is going to happen with the presidential election in our own country, hoping that compassion, humility, and decency will win out over violence, hate, and fear. The waiting can be the hardest part.

And I think that this is true, that Tom Petty got it right, that waiting is so hard because we have no control over it. Having to wait reminds us that we are not in control of this world, not in control of our lives, not even fully in control of our own bodies. Waiting makes us feel powerless. And it can make us feel anxious and scared, because something has to fill the time we spend waiting, and so often that "something" is fear. Fear of what may happen.

This morning's Gospel reading from Luke is a story about waiting. This story of Christ's resurrection has become so familiar to us that it's hard to see it in a new light, but as I waited this week, struggling to write today's sermon, I realized I wasn't waiting alone. I was waiting with the women. Waiting with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who went to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week.

They had been waiting. Jesus was crucified on Friday, the day of Preparation for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was that holy day every week when God's people rested from all their work. Jewish law demanded that when someone was crucified, their dead body had to be removed and buried that same day (Deut. 21:22-23), and so there was a rush to get Jesus' body off the cross and into a tomb before the Sabbath began. According to the Gospel of John, that's why Jesus was buried where he was, because the tomb was nearby. (John 19:42) And these faithful women, who stood at the foot of the cross, who loved Jesus so much, they saw where

his body was laid. It was custom to prepare dead bodies with oils and spices and ointments.

And they wanted to do this so badly, to honor Jesus, to love him one last time, but instead they had to go home, because the Sabbath was beginning. They had to wait. And wait. And wait.

And for the women, the waiting was the hardest part. They were grieving. They were scared that at any moment they might be arrested and killed because they were followers of Jesus. They were upset, that the body of their friend was lying in a tomb without anyone to perform the needed rituals with love and care. And all they could do was wait.

And so it's no wonder that the women went to the tomb at *early dawn* on the first day of the week. They went at the first possible moment they could, because they just couldn't wait any longer.

Every year on Easter we hear the story of what the women found at the tomb. They found it empty. Messengers and angels told them that Jesus was no longer there, that he had been raised from the dead, that he was alive! (Mt 28:3-7, Mk 16:6-7, Lk 24:4-7) Every year on Easter, we hear the story of the resurrection from one of the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But there's something different about Luke's account, something unique and peculiar about his version of the story, the one we're hearing *this year*, something that matters for us people who have to spend so much of our lives waiting.

You see, in Luke's version of the resurrection story, the women don't actually see Jesus.

In Matthew, they hear the angel's message, and as they run to tell the rest of the disciples, Jesus meets them on the road. (Mt 28:9-10) In Mark, Jesus appeared to Mary, and she went to the rest of the disciples, to tell the good news. (Mk 16:9-11) In John, Mary Magdalene

thought Jesus was the gardener, but she quickly she realized who it was standing there alive in front of her. (Jn 20:11-18)

But in Luke, the women don't see the resurrected Christ. He doesn't appear. They saw an empty tomb, and they heard two men proclaim that Jesus wasn't there, and that's it. At the end of this resurrection story, they're still waiting to see Jesus.

But despite this fact, despite the fact that they were *still* waiting, everything was different. Just hearing the news was enough to change everything.

They were still waiting, but now they were waiting in *hope*.

This morning we are gathered because, like these women, we have heard it proclaimed that Jesus is risen. We have not seen his resurrected body for ourselves. None of us have met Jesus face to face on the road. We are still, all of us, in so many ways and places in our lives, waiting. But we have heard this news, and that is enough to change *everything*.

Jesus is risen.

And through this resurrection, God has made a claim on our lives and on this world.

In raising Jesus from the dead, God has proclaimed that Good Friday will not have the last word, and neither will the violence, anger, and fear that want to fill our lives today.

In raising Jesus from the dead, God has proclaimed that sin and evil are incapable of holding back his love for us. Our sins and wrongdoings, our flaws and shortcomings, our insecurities and our fears, will not keep God from loving us, no matter what.

In raising Jesus from the dead, God has proclaimed that there is always hope, that just as God turned Good Friday into Easter Sunday, turned crucifixion into victory, turned suffering into blessing, and death into life, so God is still at work in our lives and world today. With God,

*nothing* is impossible. Life triumphs over death, hope triumphs over despair, and love *wins*. No matter how bleak things appear, no matter how bad things seem, no matter how lost we feel, God is working to bring goodness and life and hope. This world is marching, inevitably and unwaveringly towards resurrection and new life, and no darkness or evil, no terror or fear, no addiction or pain, no oppression or injustice, can or will change that, for the tomb is empty.

And this, my brothers and sisters, is why wait in hope. Because Jesus has risen.

It is a bold thing to proclaim the resurrection news in our world today, broken and hurt as it is. But that is what God calls us to do. Just like the women, we've heard the news that Jesus is risen, and now we're called to share it, just as they did. Some may think that the news of resurrection and hope that we share is just an idle tale, but share it we must.

For it is the truth, and our world needs to hear it.

Like the women, we have become bearers of this good news we have heard. We are called to share it and live it and proclaim it. We live the resurrection when we choose to forgive those who have wronged us, offering grace and hope. We live the resurrection when we stand up against hate in all its forms, whether it's directed towards immigrants or Muslims or the LGBTQ or anyone else, and instead offer love and care. We proclaim this resurrection when we lift our voices against racism and oppression and injustice and inequality, calling the world to live according to God's kingdom. We live this resurrection when we refuse to let fear lead, and instead lift our voices to proclaim the truth that God is at work, and there is always, always, always, always hope.

There is hope, even as we wait. Because it's Easter. And the tomb is empty. Jesus is risen, and the hardest part is over. Amen.