

Waiting for Godot 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Disclaimer: Material for this message was adapted in part from sermons found on the Sermon Central website.

Samuel Beckett's play, entitled *Waiting for Godot*, is a dark satire on the human condition. The play consists entirely of two tired old men, sitting on a rock, in front of a dead tree.

They have been waiting and continue to wait for someone named "Godot," because "*he might come tomorrow.*" Somehow they expect that this Godot is going to change things for the better -- but he hasn't shown up yet, and you get the sense that he never will. And as you listen to the men talk, you even begin to doubt if Godot actually exists -- or is just a figment of someone's imagination. But they continue to wait and waste away their dreary existence.

It isn't hard to figure out that "Godot" is Beckett's name for God; and the other prop in the play -- the dead tree -- represents his idea of the Church.

The implication of course, is that since there is no God, there is no one coming. Life, according to Beckett, is meaningless apart from that meaning which we make for ourselves ... without artificial props like belief in a god.

But the tradition of God coming to earth is very strong in our Christian culture: it pervades our thoughts, our conversations, and even our holidays. So Beckett's play wants to help dismantle this belief for us. Beckett would have us understand that those people who live their whole lives waiting for God, are just waiting in vain. The moral of his play is simple: stop expecting God to show up and you won't be disappointed when He fails to make the scene.

However, in his play, the futility of a life apart from God is even more evident. While Beckett wants people to give up waiting for God, he never offers anything in its place except despair. The two characters in the play are pathetic: old, tired, worn-down and pessimistic; they even contemplate suicide, but can't find the emotional energy to carry it out.

But waiting -- expectant, hopeful, waiting -- has always been a major component of the Christian faith. Think of how many lessons Jesus taught on our need to wait patiently and preparedly for His return, even when it seems like God is taking a long time. Such was the lesson from His parable about the wise bridesmaids who brought enough lamp oil to last the whole night, and the wise servants who prudently invested their master's finances (Matthew 25).

In fact, this entire season of Advent was designed, by the church, to encourage believers to remember our wait for the Messiah's first appearance, while actively preparing for His second.

But when the wait gets long, like the foolish servant -- in another of Jesus' parables --, who never expected His master's return and got a nasty surprise when he did, some become apathetic, lazy, they just don't care anymore. (Matthew 24:45-51) Still others, like the charm of the Christmas holidays, but for them, like Beckett, believing in a real Savior coming into our world is like a four-year-old filling out a list of things they want from Santa. It is a nice fantasy, but one to be grown out of.

Surprisingly, this is lack of patience with God – is nothing new. The apostle Peter wrote to impatient believers,

"in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless. ...

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance

2 Peter 3:9

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.. (2 Peter 3:3-12).

So, there will always be those who believe it is futile to wait for God.

But – as Peter just pointed out -- they forget that in the past, God has already come many times.

- He came to the Garden of Eden.
- He talked with and delivered Noah through a flood.
- He had lunch with Abraham & Sarah and promised them a son.
- He stood on Mount Sinai – giving Moses the Commandments.
- He came to us in the person of Jesus.
- And He has promised to come again.

In fact, God comes to us many times throughout our lives if our hearts are receptive and our eyes are open: Jesus said that we would see Him in the person who is hungry, the needy, the down-trodden (the last, the least, the lost).

So, how do we wait for God?

What should we be learning in this time of remembering and preparing?

The first way that we wait for God, is **patiently.**

The hardest part of waiting is the waiting, when we don't know when our waiting will be over. If we could wait a minute or two it would be one thing, but waiting often involves a great deal of time.

I was in the store the other day watching the person in front of me who wanted to leave, but her receipt was slow coming out of the cash register. She started making motions with her hand trying to speed up the cashier in retrieving her receipt. As I watched, I was amused until I realized how many times I have done something very similar. I become impatient waiting for the printer to print, the coffee to brew, and especially for the threefold gauntlet of Centertown stoplights to all turn green for me.

We who live in this culture of convenience and instant gratification have lost the art of waiting. People in places like Russia may wait in line hours for a loaf of bread or a bag of rice. People in Afghanistan may wait weeks, but we get irritated if the line at McDonald's isn't moving fast enough.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit.

It is a spiritual quality that God wants us to develop.

But for us, if something doesn't happen immediately, we get irritated and we lose hope; yet hope is essential to our faith.

The Bible says, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

*For in hope we were saved....
If we hope for what we do not see,
we wait for it with patience.*

Romans 8:22-25

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:22-25).

In his book *Sabbatical Journeys*, Henri Nouwen described a group of trapeze artists, called the **Flying Roudellas**. They taught him that, on the trapeze, there was a special rule for the flyer and the catcher. "*The flyer is the one who lets go, and the catcher is the one who catches.*"

As the flyer swings on the trapeze high above the crowd, the moment comes when he must let go. Flinging his body out in mid-air, his job is to keep flying and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to take hold of him at just the right moment.

"The flyer must never try to catch the catcher." The flyer's job is to wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch him, but he must wait. As Nouwen said, for us, "waiting is a period of learning. The longer we wait, the more we learn about him for whom we are waiting."

Waiting is not just wasting time, it is a time when God is working behind the scenes, and the primary focus of his work is often on us. As Eugene Peterson paraphrased Romans, "**Waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting**" (8:24, The Message).

I suppose that an expectant mother sometimes thinks, "Is this baby ever going to come?" especially if she is past her due date. But all you have to do is look at her and you know that it is impossible for the baby not to come. In a similar way, God is creating His new life within us, and we must wait for it to come to full term.

As our Bible records,

But when the time had fully come,
God sent his Son, born of a woman"
Galatians 4:4

Before it was time, the birth of Christ would have been premature, but when the time came, nothing could hold Him back. And when it is time for Christ to return again, nothing will be able to hold Him back.

Waiting is a skill that we need to learn, and timing is everything. It is possible to fail in our waiting and get ahead of God.

You wait and nothing seems to happen, so you panic and start to work things out on your own. You start trying to catch God instead of waiting for him to catch you; which is exactly the problem that Abraham and Sarah had. Impatient for God's promised heir, they took baby making into their own hands and created a sibling feud that has now lasted for over 4,000 years.

In Jesus' day, there was also a group, known as **Zealots**, who grew tired of waiting for the Messiah to come. Believing the promise that God would one day deliver Israel from the grip of her enemies, they attempted to hurry the program along by assassinations and rebellions, which always ended up being viciously crushed by the Roman army.

There was even a Zealot named Simon among Jesus' disciples (Matthew 10:4). Perhaps he hoped Jesus was going to be a political messiah who would establish an independent kingdom of Israel. But of course, nothing could have been further from Jesus' intent.

This may also have been the thinking of **Judas**. Not seeing things happen quickly enough, he may have thought he could force Jesus' hand by turning Him over to the

authorities. Once arrested, Jesus would then be forced to confront Roman authority, display His messianic prowess, and the revolt would begin in earnest. Only too late did he learn that his act of betrayal, also a part of God's plan, only hurried Jesus along to His unwanted but necessary death. We can't get ahead of God. We have to wait patiently.

The second way in which we are to wait is: **We wait expectantly**. God is busy bringing about His full plan for the world and for us. In His perfect timing He will birth that plan. Our job, like those faithful servants is to pay attention and to invest our talents accordingly. In his book *Character Forged from Conflict*, Gary Preston tells a story illustrating such expectant waiting.

Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, there was a young man who applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he went to the address that was listed and entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clacked away. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. The young man completed his form and sat down with seven other waiting applicants. After a few minutes, the young man stood up, crossed the room to the door of the inner office, and walked right in. Naturally the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on.

Why had this man been so bold? They muttered among themselves that they hadn't heard any summons yet. They took more than a little satisfaction in assuming the young man who went into the office would be reprimanded for his presumption and summarily disqualified for the job.

Within a few minutes the young man emerged from the inner office escorted by the interviewer, who announced to the other applicants, *'Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man.'* The other applicants began grumbling to each other, and then one spoke up, *'Wait a minute! I don't understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair.'* The employer responded, *'All the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: "If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours." None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his.'*

All of the others were just waiting. The young man got the job because he was waiting expectantly. We are all sitting in the waiting room. But it is how we wait, and what we do with the waiting, that is important. The young man in that office was listening while he waited. And because he was, he was rewarded.

It is possible to get ahead of God when we try to work things out ourselves, but it is also possible that we could miss what He is doing because we are just waiting without expecting God to really come through. Waiting does not mean just sitting down and

doing nothing. You have to be watching and looking for God to fulfill His promise. You have to believe He is going to do it.

We wait patiently.
We wait expectantly.
And we wait faithfully.

So, we wait patiently, we wait expectantly, and the final way in which we are to wait for God is **faithfully**.

To be faithful means to be full of faith — faith full. Faith that completely trusts and depends on God is an active faith, not passive.

- This is a faith that delights in doing the Master's will.
- It is love that results in action.
- It is a faith that keeps doing the right thing even when the waiting becomes long.

Gordon McDonald writes about a lesson in faithfulness which he learned from his youth.

"Running track in my prep school days taught me a valuable lesson. I was at the Pennsylvania Relays, a famous Eastern track meet, and our relay team was going to run in the championship race. I was the lead-off man and in the second lane.

The young man in the first lane held the 100-meter dash record for prep school runners. He also held a record for arrogance. . . . When I got to the line and we were putting our starting blocks down, he said, '*May the best man win. I'll be waiting for you at the finish line.*'

We went into the blocks. The gun sounded. He took off, and the other seven of us settled in behind him. We went around the first turn and down the back stretch. About 180 meters into the race, I suddenly saw the record holder in front of me, holding his side, bent over, and groaning as he jogged along. We all passed him like he was standing still. Because I'm such a gentleman, I waited for him at the finish line.

At the end of the race my coach took me aside to say, '*I hope you've learned a lesson today. It makes little difference whether you hold the record for the 100-meter dash if the race is 400-meters long.*'"

When McDonald was running that race, he could have given up. He could have let what others said discourage him, but he ran with his whole heart. He gave it all he had; his coach reminded him that it was because he was a long distance runner that he finished the race well.

Our life is not a sprint, it's a marathon.
The victory goes to those who have learned to endure.
They wait with patience.

They wait expectantly.

They live in faithfulness to God whether their faithfulness is noticed and rewarded or not.

Hear the Word of God that says,

those who wait for 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.

Isaiah 40:31

So while others, chase frantically after the world's idea of Christmas festivities, let us enjoy this season of expectant waiting until the fullness of time has once again come, as it always has and always will according to God's perfect timing.