

“Being a Good Waiter”

Genesis 15:1-6; Philippians 3:17-4:1

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I know that there are a LOT of ways that we can attempt to understand **God’s will** for our lives, and how **God’s plan** gets worked out in our world, but one statement that I don’t think many of us would argue is that *“God works in mysterious ways.”* AMEN? And as I pondered the Scriptures for today, and particularly how Abraham struggled with understanding that Divine will, I found that God’s mysterious working can even come thru someone else’s **forgetfulness**. Confused? Let me explain.

This week I had the singular JOY of having not just ONE, but TWO, Session meetings. (Yes, I did use the word ‘joy’ and ‘session meeting’ in the same sentence!) One of the ‘joys’ that I personally get out of these meetings is that one of the Elders offers up a devotional to begin our time together. For one of this week’s meetings the ‘devoting Elder’ had forgotten about their assignment until the moment of ‘devotion.’ And in an ‘inspired’ moment, it was suggested that we use the selection for that day from a familiar devotional resource, *These Days...* our own denominational publication that many of you are likely familiar with.

As the opening title of that day’s selection was read, a big smile came across my face. It was entitled **“Patiently Waiting.”** And while Abraham was NOT mentioned, he sure could have been. And as I went back to look over that day’s reading, I found it even more ‘providential’ that the whole *week* was entitled **“Listening for God’s Plan.”** Hmmm... VERRRY INTERESTING! ‘Patiently waiting’ as one was ‘listening for God’s plan.’ Coincidence? I *hardly* think so...

AND, not only did this seemingly ‘random’ selection of devotional material reinforce the importance of today’s topic of ‘waiting’ and ‘listening to God,’ but also, for me, it reinforced the value of ALL of Scripture... ‘OLD’ and ‘NEW.’ That as we consider the *rich stories*, and *real struggles*, of God’s **people** in the **past...** cast in a ‘new light’ by the **purpose** of **Jesus** in the **present...** we find hope in the **promise** of **God** in the **future**. All the while growing in our appreciation of God’s timing being perfect... and our patience being NOT-so-perfect. ☺ That like Abraham, we too have to work on **“Being a Good ‘Waiter.’”**

As we consider just what the life of this *pillar of faith* in God, the 'Hebrew hero' Abraham, has to do with us, we might see that he appears amazingly HUMAN. Yes, a mortal man just like you and me! OK, this passage starts out in a very UN-common, NOT-so-ordinarily human way: God speaks to Abraham. **"Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great."** (Genesis 15:1) (And remember, this is not a 'typo' on his name... he originally was 'Abram,' which means 'exalted father'... which would become 'Abraham', which means 'father of many'.)

And while we may not experience such an audible conversation with God, I think that God yet 'speaks' to us in many ways each and every day: through the beauty of His creation... through the people that God puts in our path... through those 'small still voices' that whisper to us day and night. Most of the time we ignore 'God speak'... and when we DO hear God, too often we can respond like he >> did: **"BUT Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me...?"** (Genesis 15:2)

We overlook the miraculous **presence** of God in our lives, failing *miserably* in being **thankful** for God's being there for us, and instead offer up our **petitions... 'O God, what will you GIVE me?'** I am afraid that too often we can be 'ungrateful' for God's provisions... taking on that worldly attitude, 'What have you done for me LATELY?' Rather than, 'Thank you, Lord, for what you do for me *continually!*'

Abram's request for the blessing of children, however, came NOT out of ingratitude, or impatience... but rather, EXPECTANCY. Out of FAITH. He KNEW that if there was ANY way that he and Sarah could have children, particularly at their advanced age (at that point, in their **80's**), it would HAVE to be through a miracle of God. That if their heritage of faith was to continue, it would require God's intervention. For only God could bring **new life** out of **aging bodies facing death**. Theirs was the same type of 'expectant faith' that would inspire the prophet Isaiah to write those famous words about 'waiting': **"Those who WAIT on the Lord will renew their strength."** (Isaiah 40:29) 'Wait' synonymous with word 'HOPE'...

So perhaps that ancient Hebrew can teach us modern-day Christians something about FAITH? Abraham had to **wait** until LATE in his life before finally realizing his dream of having a child to carry on his name. And it was through God's showing him the **faraway abundant**

beauty of stars in the **sky** that convinced him of God's **faithful provision**. That God could overcome whatever physical, human limitations he and his wife Sarah might face. Though Paul's words to the Philippians were written centuries later, they yet would have resonated with Abraham and Sarah: ***"Our citizenship is in heaven... (and GOD) will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that enables him to make all things subject to himself."*** (Philippians 3:17) 'EVEN our inability to 'spawn' future generations.'

Like Abraham, you too have served your God faithfully. In Paul's words, you have 'observed' and 'lived according to the example you have' had in faithful ones who came before you. The 'word of the Lord' to Abraham is the same to us: ***"Do not be afraid... I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."*** (Gen. 15:1) As secure as we are in God's faithful protection, it is with the same boldness that we too must come before God with our requests. If we too are to enjoy 'future generations' in which to pass on our 'legacy of faith' in our own church 'family,' we must ASK. We must have FAITH. While we believe our true 'citizenship' to be in heaven, we must yet 'wait' on the Lord in the **here-and-now!** Our future reward is not based on the people in our past, but the Jesus in our present! To borrow from Isaiah's words, those who 'wait upon the Lord' will 'renew their strength' for today... and, in the words of that great hymn of the church, *"Great is Thy Faithfulness,"* have 'bright hope for tomorrow.'

In Paul's words to the church in Galatia... and Welsh/Lake Charles, ***"Those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ...He (JESUS) redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles (US) through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."*** (Galatians 3:9, 14)

By his faith in God, through Abraham... a man ***'as good as dead,'*** in the words of Hebrews ... ***"came descendants as numerous as stars in the sky... as countless as sand on the seashore."*** (Hebrews 11:12) Irrespective of his A-G-E, A-B-E was blessed by God with NEW LIFE. By OUR faith in God, so TOO can WE 'blessed with New life'... in our **church family**... and in the **individual members** OF that 'family'!

How did Abraham demonstrate his faith in God? By what we might call **'active listening.'** He not only **engaged God** in **conversation**, but looked at the signs in front of him. He saw that

broad expanse of stars in the sky, and saw the **opportunity** that was there before him... the **reward** that awaited him if he would only **wait**. What are OUR 'stars?' Our 'opportunities' that lie before us? They may be in a neighborhood in a new part of town... or the one that we live in right now. It may be with people that we have known a long time... or hardly know at all. We must continue to ask ourselves, 'How does our service to others bear witness to the GOD we serve?'

As you saw today's sermon title, you may well have considered another meaning for 'waiter'... as in one who 'waits' on customers in the food industry. How many of you have ever served as a waiter/waitress? Or perhaps your children/grandchildren have? While I certainly learned a lot about 'customer service' growing up in the drugstore business, I never actually served as a waiter serving food and beverages. But all three of our children did. And it sure made me appreciate what 'waitstaff' do. Of how much their livelihood is **dependent** on satisfied customers, the lifeblood of a business... people who can be *not* so easy to deal with! There are certain qualities, certain characteristics, that it requires **patience**. To succeed you need to be **knowledgeable**. You have to be **personable**. One needs to 'work and play well with others'... exhibiting **teamwork**. And ironically, a good 'waiter' shouldn't do much 'waiting'... but rather, **keep moving!** The person being served has to know that they are **important**. And if a waiter does NOT do a good job, it reflects poorly on the **organization**... the owner, the **head** of that place. And we ALL know, that if someone has a **bad experience** with that server, most often **they WON'T come back**...

I THINK you know where I may be going with this. In the life of this 'organization,' YOU and I are 'waiters.' To do a good job of serving others, we need to be **patient**... **knowledgeable**... **personable**. We need to work well together as a **team**. And if we don't **keep moving** in showing our concern for others... if we do NOT let others know just how **important** they are.... it will reflect poorly not simply on us, but on our **organization**, the Church... and the **Head** of the Church. Nooo, not ME... 😊 ... but the TRUE 'Head,' **Jesus Christ**. And if someone has a bad experience, they will likely NOT come back... if we do not satisfactorily meet the needs of others, we will lose that vital 'lifeblood' of the church... PEOPLE.

Like Abraham, as we petition God for NEW LIFE, let us TRUST in God, being both **patient** and **persistent**. Let us make sure that we are **'active listeners'**... not only seeking God's will for our lives, but living it out. Whether it's with regard to the **timing** of **God**, or the **service** of His **people**, let us continue to work each day on **"Being a good 'waiter'"**...

PRAYER TIME

"Understanding that God always has my best interests at heart enables me to wait and listen for God's plan to be revealed." –Melissa Wilson, Dickson TN. With an MA in religion, chairperson of church's Christian Ed. Comm., she works as staffing coordinator for agency that provides services to adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

CHARGE

As many of you are aware, today is March 17... **St. Patrick's Day**. A day of celebration most closely associated with Ireland. Also closely linked to Ireland is a song entitled "Oh Danny Boy." You are likely familiar with the first verse:

>> **"Oh Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling... from glen to glen,
and down the mountain side. The summer's gone, and all the roses falling;
Tis you, tis you must go and I must bide."**

That last word, 'BIDE,' means to 'tolerate,' 'withstand'... to **'WAIT.'** And like the author of that song, we too have had the one WE love, Jesus Christ, leave us... Following God's plan that He 'must go.' And until He comes again, we must WAIT. But not in a *passive* sense... but in an **active** way. That indeed, 'the pipes are calling' you and me... from 'glen to glen, and down the mountainside'... or 'down at *Morganfield*'... to **proclaim the name of Jesus** by **'waiting'** on others.

As we seek to serve and grow in **'being a good waiter,'** we KNOW that we do not do so alone. But that the 'Spirit of the living God'...