

December 3, 2023

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Getting Ready ...

“The Wait”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our overall theme for the Sundays in Advent this year is “**Getting Ready ...**” and the main theme for this first Sunday is “**The Wait.**” Those two concepts strike a weird tension when you stop and think about it. When you are getting ready you are actively making preparations for something. Waiting is often understood as allowing time to go by without doing anything. So “Get ready! Wait!”

Of course, we are being a bit silly here because we know that these terms can be used together in a different way. Right now we are officially getting ready to celebrate Christmas, and there’s a lot to do, but while we’re busy getting ready we’re waiting for the day to arrive. You get ready while you’re waiting. The truth is that one can be very busy while waiting, or waiting can be doing nothing to prepare. And we know that not preparing for something usually makes for a bad outcome. However, that for which we are waiting can make all the difference in motivating us to get ready. It can compel us to intense action!

Oh, the Places You’ll Go! is a book written and illustrated by children’s author Dr. Seuss. The book attempts to describe the journey of life. It begins with the narrator congratulating a young boy who is referred to as “you,” throughout the book. The boy is “off to Great Places.”

The boy joins a hot-air balloon race. He is winning until his balloon crashes into a tree. The narrator reflects on the boy’s sudden defeat: “Wherever you fly, you’ll be the best of the best. / Wherever you go, you will top all the rest. / Except when you don’t. / Because, sometimes, you won’t.”

The boy finds himself in a “slump.” He eventually finds himself in “The Waiting Place,” which is understood as the most uneventful and “useless” place of all. The narrator goes on to explain that everyone in The Waiting Place is waiting for something. As the boy explores The Waiting Place, the narrator makes it clear that The Waiting Place is unsuitable for the boy, as he is destined for “bright places.”

Sometimes the Christian life, in the beginning, feels like an exciting hot-air balloon race where you feel that you are soaring high in the sky and winning. Then you crash into a tree. You find yourself in a slump and, eventually, in The Waiting Place. All you do is wait. You find yourself in a most useless place in life, and you just acquiesce to it, and drift along in a state of pretty much nothing. What happens when some or most of a church ends up in The Waiting Place - where folks are pretty much doing nothing and just existing?

A lot of different trees can pop a hot-air balloon. Take for example the person who is glad to be on the membership list but hardly bothers to even be there to support and use the gospel treasures. Another tree might be called “the king Hezekiah approach.” When the prophet told him that bad things were on the horizon for the nation he was just glad that he wouldn’t have to live to see it, and he just shut down. There are many trees that cause us to think that everyone else can do the hard work, which leaves those who are doing the hard work exhausted and frustrated. “I’m too old - too young - too busy!” And then there is the tree that makes us think that it’s all impossible and so we can exempt ourselves from reaching out to others with the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus. Many end up in The Waiting Place and all they’re doing is waiting.

Advent is always a time of self-examination and a point of rededication. It shouldn't ever have to be that way, but we are the kind of people that tend to give up on things that pertain to the Lord and his kingdom. We still have the sinful flesh. We like to sit at the table, but we do not always want to prepare the meal and serve. We like to look at the colorful flowers and green grass, but we hardly like to plant and water and mow when necessary. But we at Pilgrim still have work to do! Yes, the community has changed and the work is hard and the people of today are growing callous, but that hasn't removed us from the great commission of Christ, nor has it removed from us the power to forgive sins - to make disciples.

The Waiting Place is where you just wait, and that cannot be for the people of God. The Waiting Place is truly the most useless place to be. Our waiting is to be getting ready. When the apostle Paul wrote in our epistle lesson for today to the children of God at Corinth, he saw people who were looking forward to the last day. He wrote: "... you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." Paul saw people who had the gospel and longed for Jesus to reappear visibly. I hear that a lot in our day. I say it to myself and sometimes say it to others: "I sure wish Jesus would return."

But we all have to ask: "Am I just wishing that (uselessly waiting), or am I really living that?" The Corinthian Christians did not lack any gift and neither do we. They had all the gospel treasures of Jesus and so do we. The problem was that their living was in conflict with what they were desiring. When you read the first epistle to the Corinthians, you begin to wonder about the church in Corinth. It doesn't seem as if Jesus' return was really at the heart and center of who they were at all. In fact, they were a mess.

If the apostle Paul were writing a letter to the Pilgrims in Decatur, what do you think he would specifically say to us? We don't have to entirely speculate about that because Paul didn't just write first Corinthians to the church in Corinth. By extension, he was writing to us! Like the saints of the past, our lives are often in conflict with how Scripture says we should be living. And he uses the examples of those of the past for our instruction. Moreover, Paul writes in the same book in chapter 10:12-14, "... let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man." Indeed. Like the Corinthians, we have our problems.

Perhaps we are becoming worn, tired, and even complacent. Maybe we are taking Jesus and all his gifts for granted. Maybe, like king Hezekiah we see how bad things are getting and we've shut down, and are just waiting around. Prayerfully, we haven't abandoned the love that we had at first. Prayerfully, we have not become lukewarm. Prayerfully, we have not soiled our garments. Are we still willing to do the works that our Lord Jesus invites us to do? Do we still have zeal for him who gave up everything for us? Those are uncomfortable thoughts and questions aren't they? ... But necessary.

Did you happen to notice how many times Paul referred to Jesus in our short epistle lesson for this morning? It's a lot. First we read in verse three, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." In verse four, Paul writes about "... the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus." And in verse five we have been "enriched in him." Paul says that they will be sustained, guiltless at the end, "in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." He reminds them that they are "in fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord." In seven verses, Paul refers to Jesus doing something for them [and us] seven times!

We need to listen closely to what Jesus has done for us. He gave us the gift of his holy and sinless life. He suffered for each and every one of our sins. He has eternally enriched us with the gifts of heaven and a resurrection to come on the last day. This is the grace that Paul is talking about. Grace is the undeserved kindness of God in Jesus Christ toward us, and the peace that we have in knowing and believing that our sins are forgiven. It is that grace that makes The Waiting Room into a room where we are getting ourselves and others ready!

As a waiting church, we do not just sit on our hands, or put on our white robes and look up into the sky. Never! We deliberately set out on the path of life - not conforming to the scoffing and ridicule of those who reject our Lord's promised grace. We endeavor to live fruitful and effective lives in the church and community around us because of the grace and peace we have received. We would do well to remember that, as we wait for our Lord by growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ himself, that this is what equips, strengthens, and gives us the ability to endure and snatch others out of the fire.

The Lord of the church has not forgotten about his promise to come again. He will be back to take us home to heaven. Neither has he forgotten about you and me and all the temptations we face from an immoral and unbelieving society. His love for us, shown especially in his dying and rising again for the forgiveness of all our sins is once again stirred up in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This world will end. We look forward to the new beginning for us and others. But in **The Wait** we are to be **Getting Ready**. So what are you waiting for? Get Ready!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott