

Waiting and Relationship

Based on Psalm 62
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The emergency room was full on Tuesday night. Lots of people waiting for all sorts of reasons. Some reasons were more evident than others: a bandaged foot, a limp, a barking cough, a miserable baby. Other reasons were hidden and I had to resist the urge to get judge-y about other people and whether they were emergency room worthy. This was my knee-jerk reaction to having to wait on a busy night at the hospital. Especially when there are many undetectable reasons why people need emergency medical care, including, but not limited to mental health concerns – a thought which helped to stifle my inner critic – at least for a few hours.

Our son, Ollie, was brave and calm as we waited together for stitches to repair a cut to his palm. It was a long wait. We arrived around 9:00 pm Tuesday night and left around 5:00 am Wednesday morning. Like many unplanned moments in our lives, this emergency room experience provided me with a good chunk of uncharted time – to sit and reflect on the “Act of Waiting” – which is our worship theme this Fall.

In an emergency room, there are different layers of waiting. First off there is the computer that receives your name and the reason for your visit; then to waiting area 1 for triage and registration; followed by waiting areas 2 and 3. And just when you think, with a bleary, half-eye-opened-gaze, that the doors guarding admittance to the doctor on-call will cease to ever open, your name is called and with fleeting relief, you are ushered through the doors, carrying the solid, sleeping weight of a 60-pound child, to find another smaller, quieter waiting room to claim you, and taunt you with uncomfortable chairs that require pretzel-like sleeping positions...for another few hours.

There are signs on the wall explaining that this system does not work on a first come, first served basis – but, understandably, on the critical condition of each person who enters the busy, bright emergency wing in the dark of night. And we were ultimately thankful to be in a safe place, with a not so critical situation, in a Country where healthcare is accessible and affordable. Thankful to be made aware of the many people and stories around us, to fight the selfish urge to think of ourselves, before others. Waiting carries with it the possibility of readjusting our vantage point, and leaning into an awareness bigger than ourselves.

In ancient Israel over the time when the psalms were written, God was understood to be everywhere – on the move, calling to people, moving them with fire, wind and cloud. God was also understood to be carried in an important vessel, called the Arc of the Covenant and placed in the tabernacle in a place called the Holy of Holies, a place where only the High Priests could enter.

In the New Testament, the vessels that carry God’s presence are each person, each follower of Christ. What does it mean for us to be carrying God with us into our ordinary days? What does it mean to carry the divine with us into each of our relationships? What does it mean to wait for

God as an open vessel? What does it mean to recognize divine presence in ourselves and in others?

In Psalm 62, we hear the words of someone who is waiting. Most likely David, the psalmist describes himself as a leaning wall or tottering fence as he waits...He is anxious, off-kilter, and stressed. Maybe he is injured, or speaking about the limitations of old age, or maybe he is tired of living the life on the run; fleeing from a jealous King Saul to find refuge in the desert and in caves, in the strongholds of the natural world around him. If you are curious about the life of David, maybe you haven't taken a peek at David's story for a while or since you were young, thumb through 1st and 2nd Samuel. You will find a wild, unbelievable, and vulnerably human story.

What I like about this Psalm, is the idea of waiting with our souls...

The psalmist says "For God alone my soul waits in silence".

How do we wait with our souls? Do you practice this kind of waiting in your life? And not just at those times when we are forced to wait – and must wrestle with our own entitlement and impatience.

How do we as people carrying God's goodness and insight - cultivate a countercultural, awareness of the bigger picture? A time to stop and to become aware of how God is speaking to us, through each of us and around us. Even in the most stressful, frustrating day – there are slices of light and hope if we train our eyes and hearts to see them – to look beyond ourselves – to be aware and to wait with our soul's open.

In the movie entitled, *About Time*, a story unfolds about a young man who discovers that he can travel back in time. The movie is about how he learns to live with this gift. His father who shares the same ability, explains that he can't change history in a big way – it is more about how it can add to one's own life. The father uses his gift to read alot, to retire early to play as much pin-pong with his son as humanly possible...essentially, to spend time more time doing what he loves with those whom he loves.

The son bumbles around with his extraordinary gift for a while, hoping to find love. Which eventually he does; and marries and has two beautiful kids...and their life is very full and busy.

The busy young man takes his fathers advice – A secret that his father has gleaned from travelling back in time is to live each day twice. Once as an ordinary day – without noticing - Giving into the hum-drum drudgery and stress of regular routine - that can so often plague us, and keeps us from finding meaning in our ordinary moments. Then the second time – to live again through each day, but this time – noticing.

Noticing a stranger's smile and taking the time to smile back; celebrating small successes and triumphs; giving more time to loved ones; laughing more, noticing colour, taste, the people around us – the beauty of a child (instead of all the work that child creates), stopping to play and

drink-in life even in its busy moments; the joy of just laying in the same bed with a spouse or partner – which is not always cherished. The wisdom in a glance or question. The surprise and intrigue that a day can hold. The magic in our moments. Cultivating this noticing power and living from a sense of gratitude for being alive – this is what the boy learns in this practice of walking through the same day twice – taking notice the second time.

He takes this idea one step further- by skipping altogether the second walk through of each day and developing the ability to be fully aware and engaged the first time through each day. (Which of course means that all of us have this extraordinary ability to walk into a day with “our souls fully awake and attentive”, “with a grace that flows out of our gratefulness”, with an ability to lean into waiting for God – A God who is waiting too, to meet and partner with us in our daily adventures and activities.) Waiting cultivates an openness and awareness to something bigger than ourselves.

David uses imagery to describe God in Psalm 62. He says, God alone is my rock and my fortress or stronghold. To me this speaks of the need in my daily life to be grounded, when we feel anxiety or stress creeps in and I begin to feel like a tottering fence or unsupported wall... We often weather things precariously on our own.

Who are the strongholds in your life? The people you trust to open your soul with? The people with whom you can pour out your heart and find refuge? I believe that we have many touch stone people and moments in our lives that help us to keep aware of what really matters - and who call us to our best ways of living and being – those who know us – those strong places that help to remind us of who we are.

Waiting takes on so many forms in our lives. Sometimes waiting is forced on us and all we can do is grow impatient and angry about the circumstance that requires for us to wait. Other times, waiting can be leaned into – whether the circumstances around waiting are in our control or not – we can accept it as a holy interruption in regular routine. We can receive waiting as an opportunity to grow in our awareness of something greater than ourselves – to be more attentive to the people around us and the stories they carry.

Choosing to stop and listen, to quiet our motion and many daily tasks, can keep us open to what really matters in this life – relationship – with our Creator and with the people who we share our lives with. Our little visit to the ER this passed week, reminded me of other visits, other besides and people that I have - **had the privilege to wait with**...in uncertainty, in a time of death – these holy moment/thin spaces – as difficult as they can be to walk into and through – reminds us of what really matters in our living on this earth and how fragile our lives are.

The psalmist says, no matter our life’s circumstance or social status (lowborn or highborn) – we are all but a breath.

There were several people who I sat with at the ER Tuesday night, that I wonder about now. I wonder about the woman in the red dress, for whom English was a second language, and hope that she made it home safely. I wonder about the man without shoes who asked us for a dime to make enough change for the vending machine...I wonder about the kind man who

smiled at Ollie, our son, and told him to feel better...our lives touched ever so briefly and life goes on...May God enliven our souls to live each day *waiting with our souls* - being open and attentive, and noticing.