

Meadowbrook Congregational Church
“Waiting...for God”
Guest Preacher, Don Faber
July 17, 2011

Psalm 104: 24-31

²⁴ *O LORD, how manifold are your works!*

*In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.*

²⁵ *Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.*

²⁶ *There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.*

²⁷ *These all look to you*

to give them their food in due season;

²⁸ *when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.*

²⁹ *When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.*

³⁰ *When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.*

³¹ *May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;
may the LORD rejoice in his works—*

When Lee Gross asked me some time back if I would be willing to deliver a sermon this summer, I thought up the usual excuses – all biblically based, of course – for saying no.

I stood with Moses of old in saying, “Lord, I’m not eloquent, I’m slow of speech, get somebody else.” I stood with Noah in saying, “Lord, I’m not much of a swimmer. “ And then of course there’s Jonah: “Sorry Lord, I’m just not up for what you want me to do because I want to get my pound of flesh out of those depraved Ninevites!”

But on further review and reflection, I saw this as an opportunity to share among friends and fellow Christians a few thoughts on God’s way of speaking to us and the way in which we speak to God, under the general title, “Waiting...on God.”

Now, no one likes to wait. That's pretty universal, isn't it? Whether it's at traffic lights or in the checkout lane at the food store or at the bank teller's window, I'm not a good waiter. Americans in general aren't good waiters. We're builders of things, a people on the move and we simply don't have time to wait on events. We want to hurry them along, shape them to our ends and rush to the next appointment.

We are conditioned to think that we must cut down on waiting time as much as possible. Waiting at the traffic light is just so much squandered time. When we wait, we're missing out on real life and we're being prevented from doing those things that are truly meaningful. And that "I hate to wait" attitude often carries over to our relationship with God.

In the Scripture that Lee read, waiting is expressed as dependency. God's creatures will be given their food "in due season." At the proper time. When we acknowledge our dependency on God, we accept that God will meet our needs and answer our prayers "in due season." On God's time.

I will be the first to admit – and I suspect I have a lot of company here – that I tend to pray when I need something and I need it bad. "Lord, get me through that root canal I have coming up. Lord, please make that lab report a favorable one. Lord, make my boss at work see fit to give me a promotion." Because we take so much for granted, we don't feel the need to make contact with God as often as we should.

I don't believe God turns a deaf ear to our requests because, as the songwriter says, we're urged to "make all our wants and wishes known." But when we pray and wait upon God, we often don't get what we want, when we want it. We don't understand why God seems to be so distant at times. And how do we understand the mind of God in the first place?

A word or two about prayer. Scripture says to "come boldly before the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16) and "in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6.) We have to remember that prayer is not to change God, but to change us, in the words of old time theologian Charles Finney. And here is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, says about prayer to God.

"We pray to God because we believe in Him through Jesus Christ; that is to say, our prayers can never be an entreaty to God for we have no need to come before God in that way. We are privileged to know that God knows our needs before we ask him. This is what gives Christian prayer its boundless confidence and joyous certainty. It matters little what form of prayer we adopt or how many words we use. What matters is the faith which lays hold on God and touches the heart of the Father who knew us long before we came to Him." Bonhoeffer, as you may know, was hanged by the Nazis just days before his concentration camp was liberated.

Back to Hebrews where it says to come boldly before the throne of grace. The cautious Calvinist in me says we cannot insult God by addressing Him in haste, or too casually, or by giving Him ultimatums, or for purely selfish reasons that speak only to our spiritual immaturity. If I pray for the University of Michigan to defeat Ohio State – as I fervently wish – or for my son's soccer team to defeat your son's soccer team, isn't that prayer for the wrong reasons? Or does God simply laugh off these foolish attempts to invoke His name in the cause of athletics as all too typical of a fallen humanity? I leave to persons more capable than myself to determine whether God takes sides in the athletic wars or whether God is a neutral observer.

Listen to the wisdom of the Psalmist: "We wait in hope for the Lord, he is our help and our shield." As a covenant people, as a servant people, we are commanded by God to wait upon Him and upon his judgments. The people of Israel had to wait to see the Promised Land; Abraham had to wait before he fully comprehended God's promises. Even the disciples had to wait three days for the Miracle of the Resurrection. Good waiting requires patience, lots of hope and a trusting heart. Psalm 33: 21 "In him our hearts rejoice for we trust in his holy name." As Christians, we are a waiting people ...waiting for the Second Coming and waiting to be taken up in glory.

Well, how do we wait well? As people touched by his grace, we know that God waits with us. When the pain of losing a loved one is so sharp, we wonder if it will ever get better. God waits with us when we are sure we are alone and when we are fully persuaded God is anywhere but with us. God waits with us because we are God's people and we have been called to be the body of Christ. And when we wander from the paths of righteousness and seek our comfort in flashy cars and the toys of conspicuous consumption, God waits for us to come around and see the error of putting our hopes in material things.

God waits WITH us and FOR us. He waits for us to do something about the world he's given us. He waits for us to use the gifts he's given us. He waits for us to redeem the times for the betterment of his creation.

Two people are having a deep discussion. One says to the other, "I've been wanting to ask God where he was during the Holocaust and during 9/11? "Well, why don't you?," the friend asks. "Because," the first person said, "I'm afraid God might ask me the same question."

Where are we when evil stalks the land and when it's time to speak out as Christians for legislation in the public interest? As a former politician once said, "Where's the outrage?" We ought to be outraged by some things. What does it take to jar us out of our comfort zones?

God waits for us to work for justice in this broken world and to walk the walk as well as talk the talk when it comes to helping the man in rags by the side of the road.

To wait well is to slow down and to get on God's time. When we wait upon God, the nature of our prayers will change and we'll get out of the "demand mode." Give us this day our daily bread, to be sure, but in the same breath as "thy will be done," which suggest resignation and that dependency the Psalmist was talking about.

So slow down. Listen to that still, small voice. Let God's grace daily sustain you. Seek His wisdom and ask from God what in you will be a blessing to others. Let your time on earth be spent actively waiting on God to use you as his instrument. In that way, God's work on earth shall truly be our own. Thanks be to God!