

What Are We Waiting For?

I Corinthians 12:12-31

Luke 4: 14-21

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Sermon:

I hope you enjoyed the four days of ice we had this week. My wife and I recently moved to the northwest side of town, which is where all the inclement weather hit and we had about four days of being indoors, eating, and movies. One movie we watched was an excellent family movie called *Akeelah and the Bee*. It was about a young girl named Akeelah, who is an inner cities child that has a rough time of things. She comes from a single parent home and only seems to get attention from her mother, siblings, and teachers when she is doing something they don't like. It's called negative attention, and she gets it all the time.

So, one day in class her teacher notices that she is a wonderful speller of words. The teacher speaks to the principal and together they ask Akeelah to represent the school in the spelling bee. And I was very surprised at her answer. I mean, here is a girl with relatively no positive reinforcement in her life, and when someone finally comes along and commends her on her talent, she balks. Her response is that she does not want to represent the school or be in the bee. I don't understand why she reacted that way, but from that moment forward in the movie for a bit, her forward motion completely stops. It is like she just sits there and waits for something to happen or for something to be given to her. She waits without doing anything to help her cause or move her toward a goal.

Waiting is nothing new to us. We all wait for things. I read a conservative statistic this week that said the average person waits a total of 510 days during their life. The reason I call this statistic conservative is because I have been on hold with tech support. I have been on hold for certain departments in certain department stores and I remember the suction cup sound the phone makes as you pull it away from your ear after a couple of hours on hold. We have all been in the stores around the holidays, where they give you a number and you have to wait for it to appear on the red screen in the corner. Waiting is such a common event that we have music created specifically for waiting and rooms designed and built for waiting. Waiting is common to us, to our generations, to our society. But it is not specific to our culture and society.

Our ancestors waited for things to happen as well. In fact, our religious ancestors, the Jews, waited for centuries for one thing to happen. They waited for the coming of the messiah. They didn't know exactly what the messiah was going to look like. It could have been a person, a place, a time, or an event. What they did know was that the messiah would come and bring an era of peace and freedom from oppression.

The very fact that the Jews waited is what makes our scripture for the day so important in the teaching life of Jesus. Let's take a look at Luke 4:14-21. It would be good for you to read through it a couple of times at this time. But, even if you do not, I'll paraphrase most of it here.

We begin with Jesus going from place to place and making a name for himself as a great teacher. Notice that the scripture calls him teacher, but it is a different idea of teacher than we are used to in today's terminology. When we hear the word teacher, we commonly think of a person standing in a room in front of a chalkboard giving out multiple-choice tests to students

seated in desks. In Jesus' time there was an opportunity for dialogue with the teacher, but there were also elements of preaching involved. Jesus spoke about their religious history, right relationship with God, and interpreting the scriptures. And Jesus was very talented at what he did. So much so that his name spread from town to town and people knew who he was. They anticipated his arrival, hopeful that he would stay long enough to teach them as well.

Probably for this reason, when Jesus strolls into Nazareth and attends the service at the Synagogue, the religious leaders hand him the scroll from Isaiah containing Holy Scripture to read. What Jesus reads is the following:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."¹

Jesus then rolls the scroll back up, hands it to the attendant, and tells those in attendance that this scripture has been fulfilled today in their hearing. This was an amazing revelation for Jesus to give because of the nature of his claim. Let us look again at the first two lines of verse 18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus because God has anointed Jesus. Who else is God's anointed but *the messiah*? It is as if Jesus is saying, "You know the messiah you have been waiting for? Messiah is here! I am here! I am the prophet, priest, and king. I am messiah...your wait is over." And this places the Jews in a very different stance from before. Back then, they were the Jews waiting on the messiah. Now they are the Jews in the presence of the messiah. What do you suppose will happen next for them? What else is there to wait for?

Recently in this church we have had a similar situation in structure to what happened with the Jews. Don't misunderstand, this is not anywhere near the level of, "The messiah is coming!" But recently our congregation was two different congregations. One day we began talking about two congregations becoming one. There was a waiting period for us, just like there was a waiting period for Akeelah. The difference is that we didn't wait in the same way Akeelah waited. Where she seemed to just sit there, idly waiting for something to happen, we did not. We waited actively. We prepared while we waited. We had meetings between the congregations. We talked about finances and logistics. We had fellowship meetings between our people – all of which led and brought us to the time where our congregations could join together and become one. And now here we are, a new creation, a new church, and we stand on the other side of that waiting time with brand new possibilities ahead of us reaching for brand new goals.

And it is at this time that it is so important we continue to wait actively instead of idly. We must continue forward moving toward our possibilities instead of waiting for them to come to us. And there is a way we can keep ourselves active and preparing. We can ask ourselves two

¹ Luke 4:18-19 (New International Version), Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Retrieved from the Internet on 01-24-2007.
<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke%204:18-19;&version=31;>

questions. What is it that we are waiting for? And what are we doing right now that prepares us for that time?

As I said, we are a brand new church. And we have new possibilities in front of us. If you will, there are new things we are waiting for. So, we must ask ourselves this question: What is it that we are waiting for? Location is a big topic for us right now. We currently have two properties. What we must decide is whether we should put our money, resources, time, and effort into the two properties we have in order to make them meet the needs of the people, or if we should instead sell our property and invest in a new one. This is an issue we have been discussing since before the joining of the two congregations. And it is a topic we devote regular time to addressing. We are active in this matter. So we have our answer to the second question: What are we doing right now that prepares us for that time? We discuss, we find support in one way or another, and eventually we will have a vote.

What is it that we are waiting for? Most churches have a direction they go in to minister to the people. It is a direction that includes all departments and special groups. It is a kind of ministerial direction. We are a brand new church that has come from two churches. In the past both churches have had a ministerial direction. And now we must take a look at this new church and find out what the new ministerial direction will be. Every section of this church has been discussing this and making plans for it since before the church was formed. People in Christian Education, Fellowship, Worship, Finance, Outreach, and Service have all been discussing the ministerial direction of the church. And they will continue to discuss it throughout the life of the church. This is the answer to the second question: What are we doing right now that prepares us for that time? We are active in this area. We wait actively, not idly.

This is why we must continue to ask ourselves these two questions: What is it that we are waiting for? And, what are we doing right now that prepares us for that time? They are the questions that will force us to examine our activities and evaluate them and their effectiveness. They are the questions that allow us to continue waiting actively instead of waiting idly for the future.

I don't know exactly what it was that had Akeelah at a stand still with the spelling bee. I could guess that she was not comfortable speaking in front of people or that she thought she would be made fun of. Who knows for sure what gets any of us to that place where we are waiting and hoping for something to happen, and we do nothing while we wait? I remember when I was growing up I had a friend that lived in my neighborhood...well, you couldn't really call her a friend because we hated each other. Every time we saw each other, we were calling names and throwing rocks at each other. I remember being nervous about going out in the neighborhood because I figured I'd see *her* out there. I waited and waited for something to change and get better, but nothing ever did, until... One day I got sick of waiting. I went right up to her and said, "I am tired of fighting. Can we just stop it and be friends?"

Her immediate answer was, "Ok." We never fought again. And it took something as simple as waiting actively to bring about a change.

I said I didn't know what was holding Akeelah back, and I still don't. But what I do know about is the exact moment that she began to move forward again. Down deep she really wanted to do the spelling bee, so she found a coach. On her first visit to the coach's office he pointed to a plaque, which hung on his wall. He told her to read the words on the plaque aloud. I believe it was these words that shoved Akeelah out of her idle funk and got her moving toward the bee. Those words are as follows:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

I have a challenge for all of us in the coming weeks and months as we continue to reach for new and exciting goals and move together toward achieving them as a congregation and as the body of Christ. My challenge is that we stay away from idle waiting and continue actively pursuing our goals by asking ourselves these two important questions: What is it that we are waiting for? And, what are we doing right now that prepares us for that time? Amen.