

“Constructive Waiting”

At the height of the Christmas shopping season, a young boy was standing at the bottom of a department store escalator, staring intently at the handrail as it moved along and refusing to take his eyes away. A saleswoman asked, "Are you lost?"

"Nope," the boy said, "I'm waiting for my chewing gum to come back."

That boy displayed an admirable patience, but most children find it hard to wait for the things they want. I remember as a kid how hard it was to wait during the month of December. The Sears Catalog would arrive in the mail, followed by the JC Penney Catalog. We would look through the pages over and over again making our lists, scratching out one item and adding another. When wrapped presents were under the tree, the waiting seemed even longer. At that age, time seemed to stand still; now, the days pass by quickly.

The Jews knew a little about waiting. Four hundred years passed from the last prophesy regarding the Messiah until the arrival of Jesus. The Jews wondered for 400 years why God was not speaking, not delivering on the promise of the Messiah. They grew *tired* of waiting.

In an age when waiting is almost foreign to *us*, what can we learn *during* the waiting? Sometimes, *process* is just as important as *product*. What we learn *during* the wait can be just as beneficial as what we gain *after* the wait.

Our text reminded us, "Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." They are renewed and strengthened *as* they wait for God, because they know that their waiting for God can never be in vain. God is worth the wait. Waiting to understand, to figure out, to comprehend life's questions is worth the wait.

We want God to speak to us, to lead us, to guide us, but frankly sometime, we don't hear God's voice. So many other voices clamor for our attention, and we wonder why God isn't speaking. At times when listening for God, we may think that we simply do not hear so well. Ever asked God to speak up? Ever wondered why you can't hear God? But even when we can't seem to hear God very clearly, in the times when we grapple for understanding, we are to continue to wait *constructively*, meaning that we continue to believe that God will speak to us, will answer us, will help us.

God's presence has already been *promised* to us, sometimes we must wait awhile to see how that promise is *realized*. We may wonder what the future holds, how we might make it, what will happen next, but as we wait, we are to continue to seek God and keep the faith. If the answer seems slow, wait for it patiently and faithfully; but know that it will surely come. What we do while we wait is worth noting.

Henry Doggett, expert grandfather and almost as expert a gardener, was patient in most things and particularly in his hobby of vegetable gardening. However, his eight-year-old grandson Gregory had not yet learned the fine art of patience. He wanted instant results in anything he tried. Henry had given him some space in his garden to plant seeds, and was now trying to instill a bit of patience in his grandson.

"You can't control when the garden will produce," he told Gregory as they examined the little shoots peeking out of the spring soil. "And you know what? Your stomping around and poking into the soil isn't going to make growth happen any faster. One of the most important things to remember about gardening is that you have to be patient, which means you have to wait for the plants to grow on their own time."

"I hate waiting," Gregory declared as he continued to poke his little fingers into the moist soil.

"You see these little beets coming up in my side of the garden? We'll have to wait at least a couple months before they will be ready to eat," Henry said to no one in particular.

"I hate beets!" Gregory announced.

"Now that's two things you hate -- waiting and beets," Grandpa Henry teased.

"Oh, I hate other things too, but I guess I hate waiting more than anything," Gregory answered.

"Well, waiting is part of learning what we call patience," Henry continued in his soft sell approach. "Look at this garden, for instance. We just plant the seeds and water them; then we have to wait while nature does the rest. And you know, I guess none of us is *born* with patience -- and probably no one really *enjoys* waiting. But waiting with patience is something we all have to work at; it doesn't come naturally. It's like developing a skill."

"What am I supposed to do while I'm waiting? Just sit?" Gregory wanted to know.

"No, you can do *constructive* waiting," his Grandpa replied.

"What's that mean?" Gregory wanted to know.

"Well, let's take this garden, as an example again. While you're waiting, you can look for weeds that you might want to pull out -- and some people even spend a bit of time reading about how to grow a better garden. That's what *constructive* waiting is like," Henry explained. "Besides," he continued as they walked back to the house, "if what you're waiting for is really important, then the waiting is *easier*, and in the end is really worth it." (Lectionary Tales for The Pulpit, Cycle A, Merle G. Franke, CSS Publishing Company, Inc, 1995, 0-7880-0527-8)

When a couple or family is waiting for months on the birth of a baby, they are *constructive*. There are showers to plan, furniture to buy, hospital routes to prepare, suitcases to pack, classes to take, books to read.

In your prayers and petitions, in your devotional life and your desire for communion with God: slow down! Wait for God! Be patient with God, who has been so very patient with you. Know that you can *never* wait for God in vain. The answer you seek, the guidance you pray for, the presence and the help you need are sure to come. God will come to renew your strength. God will come to mount you up with wings like eagles, letting you soar above the storm, gliding in the gulf streams of hope and love and grace. This is a promise to all who faithfully seek God. Sometimes all we need is the strength to wait.

For what are *you* waiting? During this time of waiting, how can *you* be constructive? Waiting can seem like a waste of time if we do nothing except wallow in the impatience. But if we allow ourselves to place a little more emphasis upon the *process* and a little less emphasis on the *product* or outcome, then the wait can be constructive. How can your expectancy be productive? All of us have to wait for something; as you wait, try to be constructive. It's a spiritual discipline which can help build our faith in the God who will never fail us.