

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Prepare for Love

Matthew 1:18-25

Sunday, December 18, 2022

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I have learned that there is one thing you should never ask God for unless you have really thought through it. And that is patience. I asked God for patience several years ago and God has never forgotten it. I am getting really impatient about it! I am reminded of this whenever I am in traffic.

Did you hear about the woman's car that stalled in traffic? She looked in vain under the hood to identify the cause, while the driver behind her leaned relentlessly on his horn. Finally she had enough. She walked back to his car and offered sweetly, "I don't know what the matter is with my car. But if you want to go look under the hood, I'll be glad to stay here and honk for you."

Most of us struggle with patience. That's why Advent is good for us. Advent is all about learning how to wait on God, which is not always an easy thing to do.

In fact, the toughest time to be patient is when we are waiting on God to answer our prayers. How many of you have been there? How many of you are there right now? It could be for a new job, a relationship issue or health issue. Maybe it is about a problem at work that won't go away or some personal struggle. You have prayed and prayed and have sought God's will and still there is nothing, no answer, no sign, no movement.

Maybe you are growing really impatient with God. You don't get it. You have done everything you are supposed to, brought your need to God, prayed faithfully, examined your heart, and there still seems to be no answer from God. You are discouraged and getting ready to give up on your prayers and maybe even give up on your faith.

Well, don't give up. Don't quit on your prayers. Don't quit seeking God. The message I have for you today will give you encouragement and inspiration. This message will help you move beyond your discouragement by seeing that there is wisdom in waiting. In fact, this message today will motivate you to stop watching the clock and start getting yourself prepared for God's answer! For God will answer your prayer. Count on that!

I know some of you find this hard to believe. Mr. Right or Mrs. Right has not shown up. You are still stuck in the same tired situation. That problem at work doesn't seem to ever go away. That personal struggle in your life just doesn't stop. You can't see your life changing for the better. You think your life is going to be more of the same forever and ever. You think you will have to live with failure and disappointment.

The good news is that Advent is all about preparing ourselves for God to enter our lives in a powerful way. We set aside this season every year not just to decorate the trees, give and receive gifts, sing the carols and drink hot chocolate. We set aside this season every year to prepare ourselves for God's perfect answer to our problems, our struggles, our pain, our disappointments, and our frustration with waiting.

Listen closely this morning because I have a message for you that will completely change the way you have been looking at your life, your prayers and your problems. Most of all, I have a message for you that will completely change the way you see God answering your prayers. This message will cause some of you to never doubt God again.

This is what happened to Joseph. He understood what it is like to seek God for an answer and have to wait for it. But after he experienced what God promised he was never the same again.

The irony is that Joseph is kind of the step child in the Christmas story. He always takes a back seat to Mary, the angels, and the wise men. That's why I decided to devote a sermon to Joseph. He deserves it.

When I was a kid I played Joseph in our church's Christmas program. I was all excited. I got my perfect bath robe ready. I was ready to repeat my lines with perfection. So I went to my first rehearsal and I was disappointed to find that Joseph only had one line! That was it! One line! My line was a question to the innkeeper, "Do you have a room available?" The rest of the time I was just supposed to stand there next to the

crummy animals and look happy! Poor Joseph always gets the short end of the stick.

But Joseph's story is a powerful one that can teach us the wisdom and power of waiting on God. If we take a closer look at the role he played in the Christmas story we will find a message that can make a huge difference to our faith.

Most of us know the story of Christmas and most of know the role Joseph played in the story but in order to see the power in it let me tell you what happened. Joseph and Mary met. Sparks flew. Joseph proposed to Mary and she accepted. They were engaged! Of course engagement back then meant a lot more than a sparkling rock and a promise. Both families went to their lawyers and signed an agreement. You could get out of the engagement but it took a lot of red tape.

Mary got sick one morning and Joseph noticed that something wasn't right. Mary fessed up. She told Joseph she was pregnant. That would have been bad enough because they both came from very religious families. But they had bigger problems. Joseph was not the father because they had not been together before marriage! Joseph asked, "Who is the father?" This is when the soap opera fades out for a commercial!

The story continues as Mary told Joseph that she had not been with any other man. He said, "Well Mary how in the heck did it happen? Did a stork come?" Mary dropped the bomb on Joseph and told him that the child in her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Now, honestly, if you had been Joseph, would you have believed her? "Really, Mary? So I am supposed to believe this? Sure. You need to get your head examined. Have you lost your mind?" This is better than a soap opera!

What happens next is really interesting. Matthew 1:19 reads:

"Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly."

According to the Law, it was Joseph's right to have Mary stoned to death! She had shamed him and shamed the family. But he was a good religious man so he decided to do the most humane thing, just divorce her quietly, sign the papers and go back to match.com to find another wife. But watch what happens next in Matthew 1:20-21:

"But after he had considered this, an angel of the

Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'"

So Joseph wakes up and says, "I must have had too much wine last night. This can't be true! Did that really happen?" You know how dreams are. You never know. But something inside Joseph decided to trust God, to believe that the dream was true. Look at verse 24:

"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

It's a wonderful story. Joseph decided to take Mary as his wife! But what I want to focus on is the time between Joseph making this decision and Jesus being born – the time Joseph had to wait. We don't hear anything about this but I believe those nine months Joseph had to wait were the most pivotal nine months of his life.

Can you imagine how many times Joseph doubted his decision and thought of bolting? "I'm basing all of this on a dream! What if when this child is born he looks like the milk man? Look at the way my friends and family look at me in public. They don't believe me. I can tell. I wouldn't believe me either! What a crazy idea. Am I really doing this?"

Can you imagine how many times Joseph doubted God and thought of making a decision he thought was right for him, like leaving Mary?

I know many of you and many people you know are in that boat. You have been waiting and waiting. You trusted God in the beginning but your patience is running thin. The trust you had is leaking. You are afraid. You are angry. You are confused. You think you are all alone. You think God has abandoned you and your prayers. You are sick and tired of waiting and you are ready to make a quick decision that you think is best.

Well, hold on. Let me remind you what happened to Joseph. After waiting nine months and worrying, doubting, and probably thinking about leaving Mary his son Jesus was born. The star in the east lit up the sky. The angels sang like heaven. And the Magi came. The dream was true! His son was the Christ! Imagine Joseph's satisfaction. Imagine how good he felt for

waiting, for trusting God, for being patient!

I like to imagine Joseph being at a dinner party and people are introducing themselves and what they do. They are bragging. And Joseph is just sitting there very quiet. He is waiting his turn and politely listening. Finally, it is his turn, "My name is Joseph. I'm a carpenter. I'm married to Mary. Oh, and I'm also the father of the Savior of the World!"

I tell you this because I know there are many of you who are in that waiting period that Joseph was in before the dream became a reality. You are in that period between trusting God and getting your prayers answered. You are in that period between believing and receiving. And some of you are about to give up hope. Some of you already have. You are tired of waiting on God. You think all this time of waiting has been a waste of time. You have lost your patience and you are ready to do what is convenient and what seems right to you.

I want you to pause right now and think of Joseph. Just think what he would have missed if he had decided to leave Mary. Just think how that would have altered his life and the destiny God had for him. He would have missed rearing and nurturing the Savior of the World! He would have missed being one of the most important figures in the history of the world. But he didn't miss it because he was patient.

I don't want you to miss God's wonderful plan for you too! Don't quit on your faith. Don't take the easy road. Don't rush into something you will regret. God is working His purpose out for you. God is doing things in your present right now that will affect your future. This is why your patience and trust of God is critical! What we often think is waiting is part of God's larger plan. Don't spoil God's best for you. **Patience is resisting the immediate to receive God's Best.**

I want you to see a picture. This is the modest beginning of a Chinese Bamboo tree. The Chinese bamboo tree is one of the most amazing trees on the planet. After a gardener plants the seed he or she will wait five years and see nothing but a single shoot coming out of the bulb. Of course that tiny shoot must have daily food and water and the gardener knows that. Those first five years that the gardener is nourishing the plant the little shoot will grow less than an inch.

At the end of five years, however, the Chinese bamboo will perform a miracle. It will grow ninety feet tall in only ninety days! Take a look. Now when did the tree actually grow? During the first five years or during the

the last ninety days?

The answer lies in the unseen part of the tree shown in this picture. This is the tree's underground root system. During the first five years the strong root structure of the tree spreads deep and wide in the earth, preparing to support the tree when it grows tall.

So often that is how God operates in our lives. We complain about having to wait. We get frustrated and impatient with God. But what we don't see is that below the surface God is working his purposes out to prepare us for something extraordinary.

It's been said that when God wants to grow mushrooms, he can do it overnight, but when he wants to grow a mighty oak, it takes a few years. What do you want to be, a mushroom or an oak? If you want to be an oak, it is well worth the wait.

I received an email a while back that included an email from a girl who learned the reward that comes from resisting the immediate to receive God's best. I'd like to read it to you:

"The summer after graduating from college, I moved to Nashville. What I thought would be a great adventure turned out to be the hardest year of my life. When the light on my parents' porch was more exciting than the skyline of the city, I knew it was time to leave.

"I stayed late at work one afternoon to finish an application to grad school in my home state because I didn't have internet at my apartment. The next afternoon, I was unexpectedly let go from my job. I moved home and waited to hear if I had been accepted into the program...only to have the acceptance letter lost in the mail. Because my acceptance and registration was postponed, the only class I really wanted to take was supposed to be full, but a spot opened up at the last minute. It was a Thursday night class, where, on the second week, a bearded young man with a kind smile sat next to me in the last row. Ten and a half months later, he asked me to be his wife. This June, we celebrated our 7th anniversary.

"When my heart was breaking in Nashville, when I filled out a grad school application less than 24 hours before being fired, when I got into African American Lit, when Josh sat next to me and smiled...God was in the details. I never imagined after such a hard year that such goodness was waiting on the other side."

We often hear “the devil is in the details.” No, God is in the details! That is why your patience and trust in God is critical. You don’t know the things God is working out in the midst of your waiting. What God has prepared for you may be even better than you imagined. This time of waiting for you needs to be a time of listening and preparing for God’s best for you – a relationship, a new job, a new calling, a different path, a new desire, a new birth like Joseph received, a totally unexpected situation that is beyond your imagination! God’s ways our higher than our ways! **Patience is resisting the immediate to receive God’s Best.**

“In a dream God told a man to go outside and push against a huge boulder in his front yard. So every morning for the next few weeks, the man went outside and strained against the rock. He pushed and groaned and prodded and shoved, but the rock never budged.

“Finally, in a fit of exasperation the man fell to his knees and lifted his eyes to heaven. ‘What were you thinking, Lord? he cried, wiping sweat from his brow. ‘You told me to push this rock, and I’ve been pushing it for weeks, yet it has not moved an inch!’

“A voice from heaven rumbled among the clouds, then whispered in the man’s ear. ‘I told you to push the stone,” God said, ‘I didn’t tell you to move it. I’m the only one who can move it, and when you’re ready, I will. By the way, look at your hands.’

“The man looked at his hands. They had grown callused and tough with the work, and his arms bulged with muscles. Though his efforts seemed fruitless, he had grown strong; and now he was beginning to grow wise” (story by Rick Ezell).

Imagine your life lived in complete trust in God, knowing His ways are better than your ways. Imagine the confidence you will have in difficult times knowing God’s best will eventually turn up. Imagine the courage you will have living every day knowing God has your back. Just be patient. God’s best for your life is coming. Amen.



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