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*Hurry Up ...and Wait!*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

John 11:1-45

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Hurry up and wait! We've all heard, or perhaps even used this expression haven't we? It conveys the frustration we feel when there's an urgent need to get something done or accomplished...and then we're forced to stop and wait for some other person to "do their thing" before we can get what we want or may desperately need. And depending on the circumstances, if we have to stop and wait too long before our problem can be solved, watch out! Frustrations build, anxiety levels increase, tempers flare, words fly out of our mouths, and more! Think of some of those occasions...waiting for results of a medical test or procedure. Waiting for your driveway to be plowed and cleared after a blizzard. Waiting on the phone trying to work your way through some touch tone computerized menu, only to be disconnected. Waiting in the airport security line as someone goes through your bags. Waiting to get on or off Cape Cod in the summer. You get the gist, don't you? We humans don't like waiting for any of our creature comforts or conveniences, and it's especially aggravating and stressful if it's a matter of critical importance, a matter of one's health, a matter of life and death. And this is what we run into in today's Scripture. Jesus finds out that his good friend Lazarus is near death. A messenger comes saying, "Lord, your friend whom you love is very sick." But surprisingly, Jesus doesn't go right away. In fact he stays where he is two more days before even leaving for Lazarus' home in Bethany, thirty miles away. So by the time he gets there, Lazarus has succumbed to his illness and been dead for four days. Now why would Jesus make those he loves wait? This is not the Jesus we know. The Jesus of compassion, healing, help and comfort. Mary and Martha don't understand this strange reaction either. Both sisters come running to him saying, "Lord, if you had been here earlier my brother would not have died." Implied in their statement is the question, why did we have to wait?

And isn't that the same exact question we often ask God? Why do I have to wait? Why aren't you solving my family issues? Why am I not cured yet? Why isn't this relationship getting better? Why haven't I found a friend to fill this lonely place in my heart? Why is my job situation so uncertain? Why am I in this mess in the first place? Why aren't you fixing this? I'm tired of waiting! You see, waiting is that "in-between" place. It's someplace between where I am, and where I want to be... Ah ha! "Where I want to be!" You see, that very thought may be the cause of our waiting. Because what we want may not always be what God wants for us. And so we are forced to wait. Forced to "wait on the Lord."

But why? What is it that God is trying to tell us by making us wait? Well, one thing is that we learn just how deep our faith and trust in God really is. Waiting reveals whether or not we trust in God's divine providence. Now providence is not a word we hear used very often. Most of us are familiar with the word "Providence" only because it's a better alternative than Logan! But divine providence is so much more than that. Depending on which translation you use, the word "providence" actually appears no more than three times in the Bible. But the general doctrine of providence is consistently expressed throughout both Old and New Testaments. The root meaning of the word providence is "to provide for, and to know in advance." The Holman Bible Dictionary defines providence as, "God's faithful and effective care of everything that he has made, guiding it toward the end that he has chosen." This says that God, the creator of all things, will provide for, direct and govern, all things and creatures according to his ultimate plan. And this means that, in his time and way, God will care for, sustain and lead you.

Now some of you have heard me say this before, but my favorite Bible verse is Romans 8:28. It reads, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." This verse on divine providence assures us that for those of us who love and trust God, and seek to do his will, we can be assured that God will direct and work things out for our ultimate good. And I'm stressing here the word ultimate. From a human point of view, things may happen to us in the near term that are not what we want, that seem tragic or despairing. Yet God's goodness, power and purpose transcend all of these things. So for the Christian, ultimately, there really are no tragedies. Because for us, even death leads to eternal life with God. So we just have to trust that God loves us. Even when we have to wait. Even when we don't know the outcome. Even when we don't understand. We must have the attitude of the mother whose young daughter was diagnosed with cancer. As they wait for the procedures, the tests, the results, the next steps, her friend tries to console her by saying, "perhaps God will be good and cure your little girl." But then the depth of the mother's faith and trust in God's providence is revealed when she replies, "God is good whether he heals my daughter or not." Would we able to say this in the midst of our waiting?

And another reason God sometimes makes us wait is because he has something better in store for us. Let me share with you an illustration. A powerful king was growing old, and had no son to succeed him. So he announced to his people that he would choose an heir to the throne from among all the young men of the country by various competitive tests. After a series of these tests, finally only three

young men were left. The king announced that the matter would be decided by a race. The course was marked off, the judges were at their places, and all was ready. But just as the race was about to begin, a messenger from the king went to each of the three contestants and whispered privately to them, "The king is taking special note of you. Do not run when the starting gun sounds, but wait instead until the king gives you the signal." The three young men took their places eager for the race to begin. The starting gun sounded, and the crowd cheered. One of the contestants bounded forward quickly, then hesitated and stopped. Then the second one sprang forward after him, upon which the first one started running again and both ran for the goal with all their speed. The third young man stood still, looking anxiously at the king and at the two runners. The king gazed at the runners and gave no heed to the one still standing at the starting line. This young man was sure he had lost his chance. After the race was completed, all three men were brought to stand before the king. To the first he said, "Weren't you told not to run until I gave you the special signal? Why then did you run?" "I forgot," said the first man. The king asked the second man the same question. His reply was, "I thought it would be just a moment until you would give the signal, and seeing the other running, I ran also." To the third he said, "And why did you not run?" Solemnly he answered, "Because you did not give me the signal sir." And then the king said to him, "You will be the heir to my throne. For I knew that you could run, but I did not know if you could wait."

And I'm sure Jesus wondered if Martha and Mary could wait. Yes, they were anxious and upset by their loss. And they probably were angry with Jesus for not responding immediately. But then Jesus said to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Or stating it another way, "I have providence over all things. Do you trust in me?" And when Martha responded, "Yes, Lord," look at what happens. Jesus brings Lazarus back to life. Out of the grave, resurrected, alive again. At the beginning of the story, Mary and Martha were just hoping for a cure for their brother's illness. They were actually limiting their hopes to something within human understanding. And if they got what they wanted, they would have had to settle for something far less than what God wanted them to experience. And so Jesus made them wait. Because God's ultimate plan was to give them something far greater than anything that they could have imagined.

And aren't we often guilty of being like Mary and Martha? Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth century monk puts it so well when he writes, "God often cries that we are content with so little. God has infinite

treasure to bestow on us, and we regard it so lightly. And so we hinder God, and stop the current of His graces. But when He finds a soul with a lively faith and trust, He pours into it His graces and favors plentifully, and there they flow like a torrent with impetuosity and abundance.” Yes, God’s blessings can and will fill us and flow through us, if we just have faith and trust, and wait on the Lord.

I want to leave you with one final thought. The Apostle John tells us, “When Jesus saw them weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. And Jesus began to weep.” Jesus began to cry! I can’t help thinking that Jesus’ tears were twofold. First I think Jesus wept to share in the grief of Mary and Martha and the others who suffered a loss. Which tells us that when we suffer hurt or loss or pain or sorrow, our Lord Jesus Christ is there with us, and He weeps with us. But secondly, I also wonder if Jesus wept because he was hurt that those two women he loved so much questioned him and lost faith and trust in him. That they didn’t believe that "God causes all things to work together for good.” And I imagine that when we question God, he might shed those same tears. It's a good thought for us to consider this Lenten season. Amen.