

Did any of us think Todd would NOT leave? Naw. Last Sunday he looked so happy I was certain he would go. Nevertheless, I watched my email box all week for a message from him saying he had reconsidered and he didn't need Gordon and me to fill in while he's gone. Email never came. So while he's gone, we will wait for him to return.

We all know about waiting, don't we?

- Maybe a doctor runs some tests on you or someone you love, and you wait by the phone for the call telling you the results. Waiting is the hardest part.
- Maybe you're out of work and you send out hundreds of resumes, then wait for a response, any response. Waiting is the hardest part.
- Even if you have good health and a secure job, for sure you've waited for a window to open on your computer. When I got my first computer in 1986, the salesman told me it could be upgraded to go even faster – which, in 1986, would have moved it from a snail's pace to a turtle. I thought I'd never need to go faster than a snail. Now I get impatient if I have to wait 1/100th of a second for a new window to open.

So I got on my super-fast computer last week and asked Mr. Google "What percent of time do we spend waiting?" Any guesses? Mr. Google answered "A 70-year-old person will have spent 3 years waiting." Do you believe that? Can't be true! I think I've spent way more than 3 years waiting. However long our wait, we do wait.

And we're not the only ones! Our Scriptures tell multiple stories of people long ago who also had to wait. Especially in this season after Easter, we think back and remember how the disciples waited those 50 days until the Feast of Pentecost. They had buried Jesus hurriedly because by the time he breathed his last it was almost the sundown which ushered in the Sabbath, and they couldn't do anything on the Sabbath. At least nothing that resembled work! So they had to wait before they could enter his tomb to anoint his body with spices. For 36 long hours they waited. And then, early that first Easter morning when the women walked to the tomb, they saw the stone no longer covered the entrance. They heard the man tell them Jesus was not there and instruct them to tell the others he would go ahead of them and wait for them in Galilee. So the waiting shifted from the disciples to Jesus. Jesus had to wait for them to come meet him. Everybody waited then, just as everybody waits now.

So bring your thoughts back to our own day and time. We can do any number of things while we wait. We can play a game on our smart phone, read a book, we can do most anything we want to do. But about 10 years ago Holly Whitcomb wrote a book she named Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting.^{*} Who knew waiting might be a spiritual practice? Since I can imagine all of us are currently waiting for more than just Pastor Todd's return, we will delve into some of the gifts waiting for us during these first three weeks. Number One on her list is *loss of control*.

Loss of control! I must confess that I am a bit of a control freak. I don't want to lose control of even one part of my life any more than I want a defensive skunk let loose in our house. It's hard to imagine that *loss of control* can be a spiritual gift. But Holly Whitcomb says it is. So I'll tell you what she says, and you can decide for yourself.

- **Loss of control teaches us to become interdependent.**
 - We have become a nation which celebrates independence; perpetual 2-year-olds wanting to “do it myself!” So losing control teaches us to rely on each other. Remember the story about Jesus sending out his disciples two by two? He said, don’t take anything with you; depend on other people. When we have to wait, when we no longer have control, we have a chance to let other people into our lives; we can learn from them and they can learn from us. Becoming interdependent helps us to build bridges that can take us to a whole new world of caring and connecting.
- **Loss of control teaches us to grieve**
 - Grieving is another thing we’re taught to do by ourselves. “Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone.” I suppose there is a certain amount of grieving that we must do alone; there’s no getting around it. We each experience the numbness, the anger, the confusion, the guilt, the depression in our own ways. And it’s very important to fully experience each part of grieving.
 - But we cannot heal from the hurt if we go barreling along at breakneck speed without stopping to feel the pain of the moment. And in that moment, we receive the spiritual gift of waiting, and take the first step toward healing
- **The third gift of losing control is resilience**
 - When we have to wait, we can tap into our own inner resources, partnering with God to build up the life we have inside us.

Losing control of even a little piece of our lives teaches us to become interdependent, to grieve, and to tap into our inner resistance.

We might feel terrified at losing control while we wait for whatever we’re waiting for; if not terrified, at least a bit anxious. Someone taught me an awareness exercise which I teach to my students at the jail, all of whom have to wait. And wait. And wait. These inmates have lost any semblance of control over their lives. So in class they sit in a chair with their eyes closed and simply be aware of the life within them. “I feel my feet in my shoes; my shoes on the floor; the chair under my legs; my hands in my lap; the shirt on my back; the air flowing through my nostrils, filling up my lungs; the hair growing on my head. Everything that happened before now is behind me; nothing that will happen has happened yet. But at this very moment I am okay. I am safe. I am alive.” Inmates tell me they practice this awareness exercise when they’re on lock-down in their tiny cells, when they’re on their way to court shackled to the prisoners on either side. It’s a spiritual practice.

We’re not in jail. We’re here in this sanctuary. And yet we know that at some point this week each one of us will have to wait, and we have at least two choices.

- We can become impatient and tap our fingers.
- Or we can take a deep breath, feel our feet in our shoes, and be aware of the gift awaiting us when we lose control.