

Waiting

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Mid-week Eucharist, Thursday 28 November 2024

Reverend Rob Miners

1 Samuel 1.1-20; Mark 13.1-13

This morning I'm drawing on the Old Testament reading and the Gospel reading and I'm speaking on the subject of waiting.

I only remember one story on waiting and even that is probably the most tenuous link. A man had been marooned on a deserted island for four years awaiting rescue. One day he's sitting on a rock, dejectedly throwing stones into the waves, when suddenly he sees this black, slinky form swimming straight toward him. He got a bit of a fright, but as he peered closer, he saw that it was a beautiful blonde in a wetsuit.

She asked how long he'd been on this deserted island awaiting rescue. And he replied as best he could figure out it was nearly four years he'd been waiting. She asked what he missed most, and he said he'd just love a cigarette. So, she pulled down the centre zip a little and produced a packet of cigarettes and matches.

He lit up and thoroughly enjoyed his first ciggy for such a long time. Then she said to him, "I guess you haven't had a drink for a while either," zips down the wetsuit a little further and produces a little bottle of Johnny Walker whisky. She then lowered the wetsuit the zip a little further and produced a *Canberra Times*. He was amazed to learn that Julia Gillard was no longer Prime Minister and indeed there's been five others since her, with the distinct possibility of another one next year!

She then realises the poor man must have missed feminine company and says, "Do you want to play around?" And he replies, "You don't mean to say you've got a set of gold clubs in there too, do you?"

Sorry about that. This morning a common theme is *waiting* and it threads its way through the readings.

We spend a lot of our time waiting.

Some wait for doctor's reports, some wait for love, some wait for happiness or wealth, some wait for kids to grow up or, if they're adults, to mature. I've been waiting 35 or 40 years for my restored 1966 Mark II Jaguar. Every birthday, Christmas and wedding anniversary I wait with anxious anticipation. While I was Rector at St Mary's (last century) my warden gave me this and while recognising her great generosity it's not quite the real thing.



We spend so much of our time just waiting. In a few days we will be in the season of Advent, again a time of waiting. Holy Scripture is full of waiting, not just in this morning's readings. Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. St Paul waited for the second coming of Christ.

Before any great movement of God's Holy Spirit, there seems to be this time of waiting. The people of Israel were in captivity for about 430 years, waiting for Moses to lead them to freedom. Then they had to wait another 40 years before they could enter the promised land.

Joseph had to wait in prison for two years before he became Pharaoh's right hand man. Daniel had to wait 21 days before the angel could get through to him to answer his prayer. John the Baptist had to wait for the revealing of the Messiah.

The first disciples had to wait for the empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Mary had to wait for the birth of Jesus and Jesus himself had to wait until he was 30 to begin his ministry. As you go through the Scriptures there is, over and over, this theme of waiting.

When I worked in the good old English, Scottish and Australian bank at the Balmain Branch there was an engineer's workshop down the road. It was usual practice to send any new junior staff member down to the engineer's workshop and get them to ask the foreman for a "long weight". So, he'd sit them down and, when sufficient time had elapsed, he would tell them you can go back now, you've had a long enough wait. Somewhere between the engineer's workshop and the bank, sometimes it even dawned on them that 'wait/weight' can be spelt in two different ways.

So is waiting important? Does it really matter? After searching the Scriptures to see what they say about waiting I've discovered that it is very important and that it does matter a great deal to God.

Now this poses some difficulties for us because in our present age we don't like to wait for anything. "Don't miss out, ring now, go online, quote your bank card and we will send it instantly." Look at young people: often their first house, four bedrooms, ensuite, new carpet, curtains, furniture, two car garage with two new cars in it. Their parents usually waited patiently and gradually acquired all those things in due time.

When I was but a callow boy, I waited for some years for a corner of the veranda to be filled in for my bedroom. I had to share a bedroom with my grandmother. Come to think about it I still share my bedroom with a grandmother!

We don't wait with technology either. Information was once exchanged by letter, then fax, now it's email, straight onto your computer screen or even your mobile with texting. I remember in the good old days kicking a horse three miles every second day to get the mail from the letter box and hanging on for dear life as you galloped all the way home. And we didn't have a phone. Imagine only being contactable every couple of days. Frightening, isn't it? But waiting is something which we really don't want to do unless we really have to. Waiting is something we don't handle very well at all and as each generation passes the capacity to handle it gets less.

The Psalms are full of verses relating to waiting. Psalm 40.1: "I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry." We are to wait with patience. We don't know what David, the writer, was delivered from but we do know that his patience, waiting, was rewarded when the Lord heard his cry.

We can have a wait without patience. You sit in the doctor's surgery waiting room reading the 1996 *Reader's Digest* provided and after half an hour or an hour you're waiting alright but I'd suggest you're not waiting very patiently. I wonder why your blood pressure is a little higher than usual. Although my doctor told me once that he thought I had a white coat syndrome (not that he wore a white coat).

Waiting has numerous meanings of which the whole range is used in the Scriptures. Some of these include remaining, enduring, anticipation, full of hope, one who is expected to receive, and in the New Testament, waiting is often related to salvation.

When we look at the first reading from Samuel, year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord. Then we drop down to verse 7, we read that Peninnah irritated Hannah year after year because Hannah had no children. As I read the chapter, I have an image of a woman who has been praying to the Lord for years about having a child and yet, in all her waiting, the Lord took a long time in answering her prayer. Why did he keep her waiting all those

years? I don't know, I'm not the Lord. But we read in verse 20, that in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. After all those years of waiting, she was rewarded.

Often when we pray to God, we want our answers immediately: "Right now, thank you God." When sometimes the days, weeks and months go by, we start to get impatient with God. Then we arrive at the point where we really get impatient. "There's no point in all this praying business, it's all a waste of time." Then we get to "God doesn't answer prayer." And when we get to that point, perhaps he doesn't.

Ever been there? Felt like that? We give up praying and waiting because we don't get the answer when we think we should have it or how we think we should receive it. A lot of 'we's in that sentence, not too many 'God' or 'Lord'. Now what is really going on here is that we're saying to God, "Why should I wait?" Maybe God is thinking, "Why shouldn't you?" And his plan will always be worth waiting for.

What would have happened if Hannah had adopted the attitude of praying once for her son and when nothing happened instantly had given up. But she continued to wait on the Lord and year after year she accompanied her husband to worship at Shiloh. We've heard how emotional her prayers became. So much so that Eli the priest thought that she was drunk.

Psalm 37.7 says "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." And then it adds the words "Do not fret." Meaning that in our waiting we are to be courageous, not pessimistic, not worried.

There is another waiting which from a prayer perspective is wrong and is not pleasing to God. This is a wait and see attitude. We are to wait expectantly and in hope. And when we examine Scripture, this comes through very strongly. We wait with an expectancy on God. That is what God looks for because waiting is an aspect of faith, a product of faith. And God searches our hearts looking for that mustard seed of faith.

My mother was a lady of great faith who really knew about waiting. On the day of my ordination, she informed the bishop and me that she had prayed every day since I was born that I would end up in the ministry. The Lord must have got heartily sick of hearing from her daily for 15,330 days (give or take a few for leap year). Prayer is not like instant coffee. More often than not we will have to wait. The result will be God's answer to your particular circumstances. I wonder how often we have forfeited God's answer to our circumstances because we turned away to do our own thing and refused to wait. The answer is that God comes to those who wait.

We don't know how and why often God's answers are delayed. We don't know the things he longs to teach us in the waiting. While you're waiting, be aware of what God may be wanting to teach you about yourself, about faith, about relationships.

The Psalms also tell us God will strengthen the heart of those who wait. That's Psalm 27.14. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart."

To wait on God in the ways outlined in scripture brings God's strength to our emotional life, to our wills, to our moral life. Isaiah tells us "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint." This is saying to us that the result of our waiting on the Lord will be to exchange our weariness for God's strength and that the Spirit of God will lift us up and carry us through all our difficulties and give us grace to see us through to the end of our journey.

And remember, there is our God who waits for us and many times it is he who has the greatest wait.

Let's pray. Gracious and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray. Pour down on us a recognition of your abundant mercy. Give us that ability to wait with patience for your divine leading. Allow us to continue to believe in you even when you seem distant or silent. And we ask this in Jesus Christ's mighty name. Amen.