

Waiting in Shame

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

When was the last time you waited for something? This one is of those occasions where I want you to shout it out. So tell me a time recently when you waited for something and what it was.

[indistinct voices from the audience]

A new car? All right. My driver's license. Right? Your kids to come home. What else? Waiting for your son to put his shoes on. Was that this morning by any chance? Every morning, but most recently this morning. Yes thank you. Good one. Sorry? Waiting for a baby - yes! Any other good waiting experiences recently? Waiting to retire. Yup, I'm also waiting for that now. I'm actually waiting for a sabbatical, though, it starts just after Easter, so that's something I'm waiting for. How about this. Have you ever - have you ever found yourself waiting because somebody let you down? Maybe you were stood up for a date, that kind of thing. Anybody want to shout out one of those? No, nobody likes to talk about those kind of things. Those are really painful. How do you - let's go with this - how do you feel when you're waiting for something because it turns out (you find out later) that somebody was actually letting you down and that's why you were waiting. What were your emotions in those moments?

[indistinct voices from the audience]

Disappointment. Yeah. You feel unworthy as well. Anger. Grief, yes. Frustration. The one that came to mind for me was kind of like that feeling of embarrassment or shame. Waiting in shame and the feeling of, like, how could I have been so dumb to trust this person with this part of me? And I wanted you to think about waiting because we're starting the season of Advent today and Advent is a season of waiting. The word itself means onset, or arrival, or coming. You've heard all those words around Advent, but really what it is is a season of waiting. And there's two meanings. There's two arrivals, two onsets of Jesus that we observe during Advent and both of them involve waiting in one way or another.

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The first meaning is a kind of a Old Testament-y waiting, a messianic waiting. And we try to experience that one vicariously, because as people of Christian faith we believe the Messiah has already come in the person of Jesus. And that happens - we celebrate that at the incarnation of Jesus - at Christmas. And so, during the season of Advent we kind of vicariously place ourselves in the position of those who are waiting for the Messiah to come. And in some of the texts that we've heard read today from the Psalms and from Jeremiah, the prophets of Israel speak to that waiting for the Messiah to come the first time, but as Christian people we have this second type of waiting at Advent. And that's the waiting for the second coming where Jesus is returned to Earth. And that's a different kind of feeling, a different type of waiting, because we believe that Jesus has already been here, that the world is not yet quite right and we wait for Jesus to return and finish the work. But some of the some of the texts in the Bible that point us to that second coming, that position us in that second waiting, those texts can be a little bit alarming sometimes. Because they are sometimes apocalyptic, right? We'll have one of those read at the benediction today - just fair warning, you're going to get sent out of this place with an apocalyptic text. I'm not preaching on it today but we want to be exposed to all of the Scriptures that the lectionary gives us during Advent. But regardless, waiting is not something that is particularly pleasant for us, even if we're waiting for something good and we know it's good and we know what's happening. The waiting is the hardest part sometimes. That's Tom Petty, St. Tom. Has he been canonized yet? It's been a little over a year now.

[laughter from audience]

But just think of all those examples of waiting that you just shared. How many of those experiences would you describe as pleasant? Not very many of them had had pleasantness that bubbled right away to the top. And then if you add on the layer of the religious or spiritual aspect of waiting, that kind of waiting can put you into a little bit of an existential crisis can't it? We find ourselves waiting for God all the time. Waiting for God to act. That line from the Psalms that U2 appropriated in "Sunday Bloody Sunday," How long, how long must we sing this song? Whatever song it might be, whatever laments you have about the world around you, how long will it be? How long until we don't have to sing that song anymore? If we're honest about our faith there's almost always some aspect of that going on. But this season - the season of Advent - it focuses on it. It gives voice to that waiting. It allows it, and not only allows it, but it affirms it. And that's something that we need. By the way, even people who are not religious, and some of you in the room are not religious, you got dragged into this place for one reason or another, or you're not even sure why you're here and, man, I'm so glad you're here. You're my favorite people to be in the room, just so you know. But even if you're not religious, even if you don't have this biblical imagination, I think you can get this idea of existential waiting if you just look around the world around you and see what's going on. Think about all the things that you wish

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were different in the world. Whether it's environmental, [baby crying] Jonah's crying out to the Lord. Whether it's environmental, or political, or institutional, or something with your family. You can - all of you whether you're religious or not - can look around and think: how long must we sing that particular song? So this season focuses on that, gives voice to it, allows it and affirms it. It affirms the idea of a deep longing for something to be different.

As you can see I titled today's message "Waiting in Shame" because I wanted to spend a little bit of time thinking and focusing on that particular spiritual emotion. Waiting in shame. That title, those words, they came from a line from one of the Psalms. It's the psalm that the lectionary gave us today, it was read for you at the call to worship this morning from Psalm 25. And the verse that just leapt off the page to me when I read this in preparation for today's sermon was verse three: "Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame." This is something you read in the Psalms a lot. Have you felt that particular type of shame, by the way, the kind that comes from a specific type of waiting for God to act, and being disappointed? Or even just being worried that you're about to be disappointed, just as you've been disappointed in many human people who've let you down. You got stood up for a date, or someone told you they were going to do something and they didn't. There's this possibility of a spiritual waiting that feels like embarrassing and shameful like I was saying before, because sometimes it's not a person who we think has let us down, it's actually God who we think has let us down. And just as you might have that kind of flushed face feeling while you're waiting there at the restaurant table and realizing that the person is not showing up, and you're thinking how could I be so dumb? I know that some of you have that feeling about your faith right now because it's hanging by a thread, and you are worried that you're about to let go, or it's about to break. And you're worried that in that moment, if that happens, you're going to find yourself wondering about God. How could I have been so dumb? How could my soul have been so gullible? If you feel that way you are not alone. You're not alone in this room. Yes. And that's that's pretty nice, that's good, but you are not even close to alone in the story of God's people as revealed in community with each other and as revealed in the holy sacred scriptures of the Bible. When the Psalmist says "Lord don't let those who wait for you be put to shame!" what they're saying, I think, is: I'm starting to feel embarrassed that I put my trust in you in the first place. I hope that it is in some way reassuring to you to know that spiritual shame, that existential angst, is not unique to you. That it's, in fact, entirely Biblical. You know I don't like to use the word Bible in the adjectival form. I don't like to make the Bible into an adjective, because that's usually kind of a way to abuse people. You're not being biblical. Right? But Biblical in the best sense of the word, as in, this emotion is represented in the sacred scriptures you're not alone. And so because of the season of Advent as a season of waiting it's a chance for us to embrace that. And you can embrace the waiting and you don't have to embrace the shame.

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Shame on its own gets you nowhere in life. It gets you nowhere in life and it gets you nowhere in faith. Shame has been used to try to steer you in a religious direction. I know that's true but that's not the biblical use of shame in my view. It's there to reassure you, not to cajole you or convince you or force you into a place or belief. You can embrace the waiting you don't have to embrace the shame that you feel along with it. What Advent allows us to do is to acknowledge it, to recover from it, to allow God to redeem it and transform it. And what that requires is for our waiting to be a waiting in trust. To be sitting there at the table, spiritually speaking, when the one who said they would be there isn't there yet, and to trust that it's not over. That you will be joined by the lover of your soul. And that can be very very difficult, but that is what faith is. Never forget, never forget the definition of faith. The definition of faith - which is the thing that saves us by the way - is not a list of doctrines that we have to check off and say: "I have a complete set of Christian doctrines and so I have faith and so I am saved." I want you to take *that* definition of faith and put it on the ground and stomp on it, and crush it down, and put it in the recycling bin, because we're going to redeem that and change into something good. Which is a definition of faith that says: "I trust that Jesus is who he says he is, and I trust that Christ's love for me and for the world will actually become present in a new way, and will actually transform me and will actually transform the world, and that I get to see resurrections happening all around me because Jesus is who he says he is and I trust him and as I wait through the season of Advent I trust."

One of my my favorite authors is named Austin Kleon. He's written a series of books - mostly about the creative process. As a creative person I like to read how other people do their creative work. It's inspiring to me. And one of the things he does every year he writes on his blog a list of all the books he read during that year. So his book list is coming out in a few weeks here and I guarantee you it's going to be five times as long as mine. He reads so many books! And so, one of the years he posted this he got a lot of questions: how do you read so many books? And so he wrote a new blog post that said: "How to read more books this year". And step one was - I'm not kidding you - throw your phone in the ocean. Right, that's not a very practical step, but one of the other steps that was practical was this: always have a book with you. Just keep a book with you. If you have a Kindle, or if you have a Kindle app on your phone - probably not the way to do it since it's in the ocean - but if you have it just always have a book with you. So that when you are waiting, you can make the best use of that time. You're at the doctor's office, waiting. Not that doctors or keep us waiting, just read a book. You're waiting for your Lyft to get here, it's two minutes away, you might as well read a page of your book. You're at the airport, your plane has been delayed, read a book. If you don't have the book with you you can't make the best of the waiting. Makes sense. So I was thinking about that in the concept of the spiritual waiting that we do it Advent how can we make the best of our waiting.

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What's the Christian version of always carrying a book with you so that you can be productive during those times when things aren't happening as fast as you want them to?

Well, here's a couple of ideas for you. And I go back to the Psalm, Psalm 25 right after the psalmist said "Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame" they went on to say "Make me to know your ways oh Lord, teach me your paths, lead me in your truth and teach me for you are the God of my salvation. For you I wait all day long. Be mindful of your mercy, oh lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old." So right from "Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame," the Psalmist goes to this: keep me on track while I'm waiting. And then the First Thessalonians text - it's hard to say that without lipping - the First Thessalonians text. That was read right before a children's moment today said "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he also strengthen your hearts and holiness so that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." So as you can see that new testament text - that's the second type of Advent waiting, isn't it? That's a waiting for Jesus to return. And what do you do while you're waiting for Jesus to return? Well you pray that God would strengthen your hearts in holiness. It's consistent with what the Psalmist is saying: While I'm waiting, keep me on track. Make me into the person I'm supposed to be. By the way that word, "holiness" is one of those Christian buzzwords that is really unfortunate. In my tradition it meant almost exclusively sexual purity. And if you wanted to add something else onto it it was probably about drinking or smoking. That's just the segment of the church that I came from. For others of you it's different, but the word holiness has sometimes been meant to mean essentially whatever people say when they're talking about something being holier than thou. You don't actually want to be like that, right? That's not what holiness means. Holiness - that has a specific spiritual meaning. And if you are confused about what it means you can just go right to this thing in First Thessalonians. Right before the phrase about strength in your hearts and holiness it says: "May you increase and abound in love for one another and for all." *That* sounds like Jesus to me. May you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. And if you don't know how to get holy, that's what you need to do. Increase in love for one another and for all. By the way, who's included in "all"? Yourself is also included in all. And the idea here is that instead of waiting in shame, instead of wallowing in the pain of it, we should wait in holiness. We should seek to be formed and transformed by God's grace in the midst of our waiting. And that we will never understand everything that happens to us while it's happening to us. Sometimes we need the benefit of hindsight. Sometimes we need the benefit of *a lot* of hindsight. Sometimes we never understand it as long as we live. We may never understand it all, but we can put our trust in God, and we can seek to increase in love as we wait.

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So ask yourself, how does this moment, this problem, this challenge, this existential pain, this spiritual angst, this situation that the world is in, how do these things call me into deeper love for those around me? For the whole world? For myself? And remember that this this First Thessalonians text - this is unlike those first advent texts we read today. This is a Christian text. It's written to a Christian audience. There's no expectation for these people that just because they've come to Christ they already know everything, or that they shouldn't feel spiritually unsettled. And the wonderful thing about Christian waiting as opposed to that vicarious messianic waiting is that we don't just wait *for* Jesus. We in some sense wait *with* Jesus. That's for the subtitle for Advent this year here at Artisan: Waiting with Jesus

In a moment we're going to transition to Communion. what a great way to imagine ourselves waiting with Jesus when we're at the table together with the body and blood of the Savior. And because it's Communion it means we get to wait with not only Jesus but with each other. And so whatever pain needs to be borne up can be carried by the people around you. So prepare your hearts for that. Something new that we're doing during Advent - we'll see if it sticks - is that we are doing our confession and creed moments right before Communion. And so I want to take this opportunity to confess our faith together using the Apostles Creed, and we'll do it as we prepare to come to the table together. And once again don't think of it as a list of things that you have to check off so that you have a complete set. It's not about pounding doctrine into our hearts or minds, it's about being formed and shaped around the set of central christian ideas of faith. So let's say the creed together. We can put that on the screen and then we'll take communion together.

I believe in God the Father Almighty The Creator of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord. Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit born of the version of Mary suffered under conscious. This crucified died and was buried he descended to. The third day he arose again from the day. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty whence he should come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit the holy catholic church the communion of saints the forgiveness of sins the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

Our communion table is open to all who seek to follow Jesus in this place today. Come and receive it. There are many options on the table but they are all the same table. We have regular bread, gluten free bread, we have juice and alcoholic wine and we have in the cup here individually sealed containers for anybody who might need something that's entirely sterile. Whatever option works best for you, please avail yourself of it as you come to the table. As you continue to sing there will be a member of the prayer team at the back of the room who will

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pray with you during this time if you'd like. continue to worship God in all these ways as you continue to respond to God's spirit, Amen.

[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com