

“The Book of Action: Wait For It!”

Exodus 16:1–4, Acts 1:1–11

The Rev. Dr. Andrew L. McDonald

The House of Hope Presbyterian Church

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One of the most exciting feelings in the world is running track. Imagine exercising and working out all winter. Building up to it. Now, the day arrives: the first track meet of the year. You get to strut your stuff. To show what you can do. Show off your stride! You gather at the meet with all the other runners. You warm up. You stretch out. You are wearing those feather light track shoes with sharp cleats, and no socks. They might weigh you down. The voice of the announcer blares over the loudspeaker: Your race is up next. They call your heat to step up to the starting line. You place your cleats in the starting blocks, the referee raises the starter’s pistol and says: Runners on your mark, get set... Wait! That will take away your mojo.

I mean, you are primed, ready, and stuck at the starting line. Is that what happens after the Resurrection? Jesus is raised from the dead. He encounters the women, then a few of the disciples. Then he reveals himself to the rest of them. Then a whole host of followers. They are ready to ROLL! And Jesus tells them: On your mark, get set.... Wait. Wait here in Jerusalem. Don’t you just want to say: “Jesus, what is up with that?” It seems there are important times in the experience of the faithful when the most important thing to do is to slow... down. And wait.

Think about the Exodus. God freed Moses and the slaves from Pharaoh’s power: They left Egypt, headed for the Land of Milk and Honey. They could have gone into the Promised Land. It would have been less than a two week journey. Instead it took them 40 years wandering in the wilderness, and waiting. Why? Did you hear it in the Exodus reading today? Not long after they are set free, The whole group of them start complaining ... murmuring ... whining. God provides again and again, but still they whine. God gets so fed up with them. I am surprised there is not an 11th Commandment: Thou shalt not whine at the Lord thy God.

The problem is not just that the Hebrews used to BE slaves: It is that they still THOUGHT like slaves. Thought like slaves, talked like slaves, acted like slaves. If they had just, you know, waltzed into the Promised Land After a couple of weeks playing golf in the desert, they would have ended up recreating the only thing they knew: setting up a new slavery industrial complex in the Promised Land.

Remember that line in the movie Shawshank Redemption where Red the prisoner, had been in prison for 30 years, when someone suggests he might get parole, Red says, “I wouldn’t know how to act on the outside.

I'm an institutional man now." That's the Hebrews. That's the Disciples. And that's us. We get caught up in the old system: We become slaves to a way of thinking. Prisoners to the way things have been. So when the disciples of Jesus are all revved up about the resurrection: They are saying: Resurrection: let's go! Jesus says: No! Wait. Resurrection is not first a call to action; it is a call to wait. There are times when some Holy Procrastination is a good thing. Whereas the Resurrection happens to Jesus in three days. For the disciples, it takes a lot longer for the resurrection to form in their consciousness, and to reshape their relations. Wait: God's time. Wait: learn to depend on God. Reminds us of the limitations of our seeing.

So much of our lives, we are absolutely convinced, that we are in charge. We are in control. It's our call regarding what happens. To wait, is to entertain the possibility that God has some other plans. That God does not make all time equal. That there are times when what we want to happen is going to fail. To wait is to have time to consider, not just "What do I want?" But what does God want? What is God enabling and empowering us to do and to become? Wait for God to give us the clue. Waiting is not a passive activity. It is an active waiting. It is active. Passionate. There is a song by Mumford and Sons: I Will Wait. I love that song. To be candid, I like it so much, I thought, Man, I'd really like to play that song for the congregation on my guitar. Then I thought, Man, I'd really like to keep my job." So I won't play it, but I do commend the song to you: First verse is on the cover of the bulletin.

"I'll kneel down, know my ground, I will wait, I will wait for you..." Reminds me of theologian Paul Tillich: God is the Ground of our Being. To stand on the Ground of our Being and wait. What fascinates me is that it is a song that is clearly about waiting for a religious experience, But with a power and intensity that is relentless and compelling. Our waiting as people of faith is not a passive experience, but a waiting with intensity, as we live into a discovery of what it means to be people of the resurrection, living in a world redeemed by the resurrection. It involves practice.

Practicing living as resurrection people. Intensity: we live into an awareness of the resurrection. Once I heard a 70 year old man talk about how he used to pitch baseball in high school, in college, in the minors and briefly in the majors. Something tore in his shoulder and he had not picked up a baseball in 40 years. But he said, you see how I hold my arm differently than other people? That's from that pitching I did 40 years ago. That practice still shapes my body. Yeah, that's what we want: to practice living as resurrection people so hard, so well, that it shapes everything about us. When we practice being resurrection people: It changes our spiritual strength. Shapes our moral posture. It changes how we stand in life.

So Wait, ACTIVELY, for Jesus to show us how to live in a resurrection haunted world: Shaping ourselves by living like resurrection people. Resurrection people are not arrogant enough to think we do it on our own. It is about the interactions of a community.

The disciples in Acts, while they were waiting, actively practiced this kind of living. The disciples gathered together, they ate together, they prayed together. They talked together. They sang

together. They shared financially together. They welcomed other people together. They loved with a sacrificial love together. Together, together, together. The key is togetherness. Which is why church is so important to us: Practicing becoming the body of Christ. Together we experience what it means to live as resurrection people. People who are free not saving it all up for ourselves, but free to invest our lives in one another. Empowering each other to grow. Being transformed as we experience the love through a community where people practice becoming a people of love.

Christian community is an exercise, a practice: where we practice enough that it shapes us, changes us. The Christian community is where we practice being resurrection people. Wait and learn to pay attention to what time God says it truly is. Wait.... And pray. It is not just sitting around. They pray. Together. My class mates took a course of prayer with Henri Nouwen. Homework: Henri required them to spend one hour every day in prayer. And during class, they spent 5 hours straight in prayer together. I think, if you ever trying praying like this, That you will run out of things to pray for in about 7 minutes. Maybe. Then you learn a new way of praying: Prayer as bringing everything before God. Prayer as the practice of living in the presence of God. Learn to bring life before God. It is a different way of existing. Bring yourself to an awareness that you are living in a resurrection world right now.

On your mark, get set.... Wait. Pray. Together. Watch for what happens. Wait: Learn to listen. Waiting is equated with wisdom. Waiting shapes us: we learn to be expectant. Something is going to happen. Look! God in the book of Action is disruptive. In the next chapter, we will hear About these church people causing a riot. Disrupting some local businesses. Perturbing some politicians. Being part of a break in at a prison. People will say, "These Christians, they're turning the world upside down." But wait: first: they have to open their minds to the radical message they have received: That Christ is alive. God has intruded on the realm of death, and brought life. Take that in.

That is the game changer for life. Wait: Jesus equips his followers with a new spirit. The message of the gospel is disruptive because God intrudes in unexpected ways. God breaks in. God interferes. God resurrects. God gives new life. So the question is: do we see it? Or have our imaginations and expectations about God become too confined? Too one-dimensional? Too cautious?

The book of Action confronts us to slow down, wait: look again at our lives, Look again at our world, our expectations. Is our sense of wonder wonderful enough? Nothing can separate us from the love of God: not height, breadth or depth. God is more. Death is supposed to be the end. There is more. Drives thinking to its depths, heightens the imagination, liberates our actions. For us, there is more. God is more. It takes time to take that in. To wrap our minds around that reality.

We have to talk about that. How would we live differently if the resurrection were true? How would we treat people? What acts of courage would we embody? What acts of generosity? How does the world look differently when it is bathed in the light of the Resurrection? It is about us learning to speak in awareness of the resurrection: When we speak, we shatter the shackles of hopelessness; we shatter settled reality with the generative power of God's Word.

And the resurrection world comes forth. It is a word "...longingly received by those who live at the edge of despair, resignation and conformity." (Bruggemann, p. 4) I had the great honor of being asked to do the wedding for the son and daughter in law of my good friends Ross and Janet Thompson last week in Toronto. That big storm that hit St. Paul the night before that storm greeted me in Toronto when my plane landed. So I'm riding from the airport to downtown in the back of the Taxi. The Pakistani driver, Adiv, and I are having a great time talking, then the traffic gets heavier, the rain comes down harder. The road gets slipperier. Adiv takes his foot off the gas. I look out the window and see this big sign over the Interstate, A black LED sign with bright white lights: Right in the middle of the interstate, this sign boldly proclaims: "Somebody loves you. Slow Down."

I took that as a theological statement. I took that as a message from God. I got the message, but I'm not sure all the other drivers did. Slow down. Wait. Imagine living in a world where all around you, You see the signs: Somebody loves you. Enough to sacrifice everything for you. Imagine living in that world. You do. Because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, you do! Wait ... until you see what comes next! Amen.