

It is said that Americans are the most time-conscious people in the world. We are always in a hurry. We invented fast food, instant coffee, instant messenger, express mail, express oil changes and expressways. We are people constantly on the move. As one man put it, we're people who shout at our microwave ovens to hurry up.

I'm not going to ask you to hold up your hand if you enjoy waiting . . . for anything. That would hold up my sermon too much. And that would be a cardinal sin.

One lady wrote about her frustrations waiting in line. She wrote: "Here are the reasons I'd like to thank Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and my local grocer for having 25 checkout lanes and only three open at any given time . . .

"Waiting in long lines keeps my domestic brain from going completely idle there's so much to learn!

"I can catch up on my magazine reading without buying any.

"I have time to leave my cart in line and run back to get the 13 things on my list I forgot.

"I can be one of those annoying cell phone users and catch up on all my phone calls to my insurance agent, mother-in-law, and Auntie Anne.

"I can catch a quick catnap now rather than on the drive home.

"I can assess what other people have in their carts and get exciting new dinner ideas.

"I can finally apply my top coat of nail polish with plenty of drying time.

"I can run next door and pick up my dry cleaning.

"I can update my coupon organizer and leave the trash in the we-never-open-enough-checkout-lanes store instead of my purse.

"I can practice my standup comedy routines on unsuspecting fellow customers.

"I can practice some standing yoga poses and then do those isometric muscle-contracting exercises no one else in line is supposed to know you're doing.

"I can taste test my package of the newest low-carb, zero-transfat, Splenda-saturated cookies.

"I can breathe heavily on my T-bones so they're defrosted in time for dinner and I won't have to leave them out on the driveway in the hot late afternoon sun as I normally do." (1) Things to do while you're waiting in line. We've all been there, haven't we? Times when we've had to wait.

Dr. Stanley Sneeringer writes about the impatience we feel while waiting for an elevator to arrive. Manufacturers such as Otis Elevator have this down to a science. They know that a good waiting time for an elevator is in the neighborhood of 15 seconds, because at around 40 seconds people start to get visibly upset. "When they're waiting for an elevator, as well as when they're in an elevator, they don't really feel they can do much productive," says one executive at Otis. Once on board, elevator antsiness only intensifies while waiting for the door to close.

Dr. Sneeringer asks, "How long do you think you generally have to wait? Twenty seconds? Ten seconds? Five seconds? Two seconds?"

“[The] answer: only two to four seconds, which doesn’t sound like much, but feels for some of us like a very long time. And not just if we’re anxious Americans. ‘If you travel in Asia at all,’ observes [this same executive], ‘you will notice that the CLOSE DOOR button in elevators is the one with the paint worn off. It gets used more than any other button in the elevator.’ Asians can’t wait for that door to close so they can be on their way.

Ironically, notes Dr. Sneeringer, the CLOSE DOOR button is often disabled by building managers for liability reasons. People keep pushing the button and it doesn’t even work. It is a dummy, a piece of exercise equipment for anxious fingers.” (2)

The point is that few of us enjoy waiting: in an elevator, in a long shopping line, in the doctor’s office or wherever we happen to be.

One woman tells about arriving 20 minutes early for her son’s one o’clock appointment with the doctor. She watched patient after patient disappear into the various rooms. When she was still sitting in the waiting room 1½ hours later, she’d had enough and had become pretty irate. Fortunately, as she got up and went to the receptionist, she calmed down enough to handle it without anger.

When she arrived at the desk she said calmly, “I know my son’s appointment was for one o’clock. Can you tell me if that was a.m. or p.m.?” (3)

What a great way to express your frustration. I wish I could come up with witty lines like that when I’m frustrated. And yet, waiting is a part of life.

Here is something that you need to know: waiting plays a big role in the Bible. Think about it. Biblical characters spent a considerable part of their lives waiting.

Noah waited 120 years until it began to rain.

Abraham waited until he was 99 years old before his promised son Isaac was born.

The children of Israel waited in slavery for 400 years before God sent Moses to deliver them.

God told Moses he would lead his people out of slavery, but then made him wait in the desert 40 years before he was allowed to do anything about it.

Joseph, unjustly accused, spent 14 years in prison. Then God elevated him to second-in-command in Egypt.

God had David anointed as king, but then David waited for years until the death of Saul before he actually ascended to the throne.

Job waited a lifetime, 60-70 years, before he was vindicated.

Even Jesus waited for 30 years before he started his ministry.

Waiting was a part of life for the heroes of the Bible, just as it is part of life for us.

In today’s lesson from the book of Acts, Jesus gives his disciples a difficult assignment. He tells them to wait. It was just before Christ’s ascension into heaven. Listen to these important words: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating

with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised . . .”

Don't you think that is interesting? Before they did anything else, they were to wait. It's a little bit ironic. The Book of Acts is sometimes called, “The Acts of the Apostles.” It is a record of their activities the many things they did. But here in the first chapter of the book Christ is telling them to do nothing. First, they are to wait. But what is it for which they are waiting?

They are awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Then a few verses later he says to them: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

This is the last thing Christ says to them before he leaves this earth. Actually there are basically two commands that Christ gives them in this passage. The first is to wait for the gift of the Spirit and the second is that they are to be his witnesses. These two commands are sequential: wait and then witness. Why do I say they are sequential? It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the power we need to bear witness to our faith. No waiting no witness, at least no effective witness. I suspect this is why many of us are so feeble in our witness to faith. We are not spending enough time waiting.

Many of us grew up loving the King James Version translation of Isaiah 40:31: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Waiting precedes witnessing. The Holy Spirit gives us power for this demanding task.

I like the way one unknown author describes the work of the Spirit. He uses the analogy of a common source of power, gasoline. He says that the power of gasoline can be experienced in two different ways. It can be unleashed, or it can be harnessed.

Suppose I were to drop a lighted match in a ten gallon barrel of gasoline. What will happen at that point? I would probably die. Ten gallons of gas can produce quite an explosion.

On the other hand, suppose I were to pour that ten gallons of gas into the gas tank of my car. Then, depending on the fuel efficiency of my car, I might be able to drive hundreds of miles. Dropping a lighted match into a barrel of gasoline might produce a spectacular effect, but a controlled burn will take me a lot further in life.

The Holy Spirit is the fuel in the Christian's tank to help us to be all that Christ has called us to be. We wait on the gift of the Holy Spirit, then we seek to live for Christ. If we want to mount up with wings as eagles, we must first wait upon the Lord. We must pray for Christ's Holy Spirit within us.

There was once a German Lutheran missionary to Sumatra named Ludwig Nommensen. Ludwig has been described as one of the most successful missionaries ever to preach the gospel.

Ludwig went to work with a tribe in a remote area of Sumatra. The village chief welcomed him. He said, “You have 2 years to learn our customs and convince us you have a message worth hearing.” The chief wanted Ludwig to explain how Christianity differs from the morality and the traditions the tribe already had. “We already know what is right,” the chief explained. “We too have laws that say we must not steal, or take our neighbor's wives, or tell lies.”

Ludwig replied, “That's true. But my God supplies the power needed to keep those laws.”

This startled the chief. “Can you really teach my people to live better?”

“No, I can’t,” responded Ludwig. “But if they receive Jesus Christ, God will give them the strength to do what is right.”

The chief invited him to stay another 6 months, during which Ludwig preached the gospel and taught villagers how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians. “You can stay as long as you want,” the chief finally announced. “Your God walks with [people] and gives them strength to do the things He requires.” (4)

Many Christian believers have never grasped this principle. The Christ life can never be lived apart from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. We need to spend time waiting, as well as witnessing. We need to pray that God will give us His Spirit to live within us that we might be empowered to be all that He has called us to be.

This feast of the Ascension is not so much about Jesus’ departure but rather the new empowerment that happens when Jesus, raised from the dead, is associated with his Father in the transformation of the world. For Jesus ascends in power to bestow power upon his followers. Jesus vanishes from our midst in one kind of presence in order for us to be empowered by the Holy Spirit he sends upon us.

The angels make this point in almost a comical way to the Apostles. They stand, staring up into the sky, looking at Jesus as his body vanishes. “Men of Galilee,” they say, “Why are you looking into the heavens?” This is just like the angels message to the women on Easter morning: Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is raised. Now we can live in his resurrection. He does the same thing to the disciples on their way to Emmaus: once they recognize him, he vanishes from their sight. The point is not his risen Body, as essential as his resurrection is. The point is that we are now empowered to live his life and continue his ministry.

This is what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us: our prayer, our service, our care for each other, our witness to Jesus in our lives, our inviting, our sharing—all of this is the power of Jesus given to us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus wants no pity-parties. He wants no extended grieving. He does not need us to cling onto his body. Rather, filled with the same power of God by which Jesus was raised from the dead, he wants us to live risen lives, to live Easter and be Easter in the world today.

Then and only then can we experience the wisdom of the words of Isaiah: “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

1. Sermon Fodder, <http://www.sermonfodder.com/>.
2. <http://www.faithlutheranchurch.org/00sermons/07-23-00.htm>
3. Clean Laffs, <http://www.gophercentral.com/sub/sub-jokes.html>.

4. Davon Huss, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/scripture/illustrations-on-romans-715-725.asp?passage=romans%207:15-7:25>. I hate Sundays when there are two very important events to remember.

Memorial Day – A Day to remember not veterans but those who were denied coming home to be veterans. We remember those who made the sacrifice on our behalf.

Why May?

It was a spring morning in 1866, just after the Civil War that had devastated the South. A group of Southerners did something quite extraordinary. They marched down the streets of what was left of their town to a cemetery. There they decorated the graves of the soldiers. All the soldiers Union as well as Confederate. The mothers and daughters and widows had buried their dead. Now they buried their hatred. The time for healing had come. It was the first **memorial day**.

Have you ever wondered why **memorial day** is marked in May? Its date doesn't recall some historic battle. Or the start of some war. Or the signing of an armistice. Why, then, May? For a very practical reason. Because it is a time when flowers bloom. Flowers with which to decorate graves.

We come to reflect. We reflect upon the awful cost of war and the fact that freedom is costly. Consider if you will these footnotes of history concerning the battle at Shiloh. If Lew Wallace who fought on the Shiloh battlefield, had been killed, then we would never have known of the great American literary work BEN HUR. If Ulysses. S. Grant had been slain at Shiloh we would have lost a president of the United States. If Francis A Shoup had fallen while leading his Confederate Battalions we would have lost a university president. But these were the ones who survived to live out their potential and life dreams. What of those who did not make it through? We must lament this day how many potential doctors, authors, college presidents, political leaders, clergymen, and inventors had their careers cut short during the horrible two days of Shiloh. Then multiply that by all of the battles and all of the wars in America's history and we begin to realize how staggering the toll: All in all 1 million deaths. Thus, it is right as we gather this morning that we remember, less we forget that war robs us of the flower of our nation.

Then there is Pentecost

You and I are not likely to get that excited in our worship service. But sometimes don't you wish we did? Oh, not in an emotional, showy sense. Many of us are turned off by mere emotionalism. To be honest sometimes I like when someone comes to Mass and gives me an AMEN.

WHEN PEOPLE FIRST MEET THE MASTER THEY HAVE THAT KIND OF EXCITEMENT. Studies in Church Growth reveal that the most enthusiastic members in most churches are the newest members. They have an enthusiasm and a willingness to serve that some people who have been around the church for a long time have somehow misplaced. That is one good reason for a church to keep reaching out. New people bring excitement into a church.

The popular sociologist and prominent Baptist minister, Harvey Cox, tells us that the only advice his father ever gave him concerning religion was, "Don't be a fanatic." It is amazing how uncomfortable we feel in the presence of someone who is really charged up about his or her faith. Yet there is something about a fresh experience of Christ that has that kind of effect on us.

If you and I are not as excited about the things of faith as we once were, perhaps it is because we are not as in touch as we once were with the source of our strength and power. When people first meet the Master, there is excitement. However, there is something else we need to see. We need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has not left us. The spirit the Church received at Pentecost is still in the Church and the Spirit we received at Confirmation is still in us. It is time for us to let the Spirit out.

Letting the Spirit out gives us Excitement. EXCITEMENT IS FED BY TAKING THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE. When we meet Christ, it is an exciting experience. To keep that excitement alive, however, we need share that experience with someone else. E. Stanley Jones once compared faith to electricity. To be effective it must not be bottled up, but must be passed on. The scientific world is aglow right now with news about superconductors conductors that can transmit electricity with practically no resistance or loss. That is the ministry to which God is calling His people today. We are to be "superconductors" passing on His love, His joy, His peace with no resistance or loss.

There was a large church in the downtown of a large city, a beautiful structure. It had 4 stories. It was neoGothic with flying buttresses, a classic large church building. It had a very dignified, educated pastor and a wonderful choir of professional quality. The church practiced what one pastor described as a sort of "osmosis evangelism." They expected Christ to sort of "ooze" out of their fellowship into the world outside.

In the Narthex, the entry hallway to the church, they had a 10 feet tall marble statue of Christ with his arms outstretched. But times changed, people moved away, to the suburbs. The church declined. They couldn't keep the building up. It was hardly used. The Bishop considered closing it.

One night a fire broke out. Faulty wiring. The whole church went up in flames. Oak walls in the sanctuary, etc. were destroyed. The floor in the Narthex around the statue of Christ gave way and the statue went crashing to the floor of the basement. The next afternoon, after the fire department had doused the flames, workmen started to clean up and remove any surviving valuables. Then they were going to wreck what was left of the building for safety's sake. One of the workmen in the basement found the statue of Christ with hardly a mark on it, hardly a chip broken off. Gently they got a cable around it, lifted it out with a crane and set it on the sidewalk. Two businessmen were passing by. They looked at the ruins of the church and at the statue of Christ. One said sarcastically, "Well, looks like Jesus is all they got left." The other looked at the sight and said, "At least they got him out on the sidewalk where the people are."

Another thing that Church Growth experts have noticed is that growing churches are happy churches. There is something about the experience of taking Christ out on the sidewalk where the people are that does something for the morale of a congregation. Many more get caught up in their enthusiasm.

THIS IS TO SAY THAT THE KEYS TO AN EXCITING AND REWARDING LIFE ARE FAITH AND LOVE. Faith-meeting the Master. Love-sharing him with others.

Faith is more than learning a certain set of propositions. The life of faith is a life of positive expectancy. "I have met the Master. He will not fail me."

Story about a schoolteacher named Miss Thompson. Miss Thompson was a conscientious teacher who tried to treat all her students the same. There was one little boy, however, who was difficult for her even to like. His name was Teddy Stallard. Teddy didn't seem to be interested in school. He was not an attractive child, his schoolwork was horrendous and his attitude was no better. In short, there was certainly nothing loveable about Teddy Stallard. Indeed, for some strange reason, Miss Thompson felt a great deal of resentment toward Teddy. She almost enjoyed giving him "F's." There was something about him that rubbed her the wrong way.

Miss Thompson knew Teddy's background. His school records indicated that in the first grade he showed some promise but he had problems at home. In the second grade his mother fell seriously ill and Teddy started falling behind. In the third grade his mother died. Teddy was tabbed as a slow learner. In the fourth grade he was far behind. His teacher noted that his father had no interest in Teddy's progress. Miss Thompson knew Teddy's situation, but still there was something about him that she resented.

Christmas time came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's room brought her some gifts. To her surprise among those gifts was a very crudely wrapped present from Teddy. Opening it in front of the other children she discovered a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. Sensing that the other children were beginning to smirk and giggle at the simple gift, Miss Thompson had the presence of mind to put on the bracelet and open the perfume. She put some of the perfume on her wrist which she invited the children to smell. "Isn't this bracelet beautiful?" she asked the children. "Doesn't this perfume smell lovely?" Taking their cue from her the children responded with "oohs," and "aahs."

At the end of the school day, little Teddy came to Miss Thompson's desk and said, "Miss Thompson...Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother...and her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents."

When Teddy left, Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God for forgiveness for her attitude toward Teddy. To make a long story short, from that day forward Miss Thompson became a new teacher and Teddy Stallard became a new pupil. Both Teddy's attitude and his grades dramatically improved.

Many years later Miss Thompson received a letter from Teddy telling her that he would be graduating from high school second in his class. It was signed, "Love, Teddy Stallard." Four years later she received another letter from Teddy telling her that he was graduating from college first in his class. Four years later there was another letter to inform her that the young fellow

who once presented her with a gaudy bracelet with half the rhinestones missing and a cheap bottle of perfume was now Theodore Stallard, M.D. Also, he was getting married. His father was dead now, too. Would Miss Thompson be willing to sit where his mother would sit for the wedding if she were alive? "You are all the family I have left now," wrote Teddy. (2)

Miss Thompson sat proudly where Teddy's mother would have been seated for that wedding. That moment of sensitivity and compassion many years before had earned her that right. I am trying to say to you this morning that there are some very special people in this world. They are the luckiest people alive. They are enthusiastic, joyful people. They are characterized primarily by two attributes. They have faith a positive expectation about what God is going to do in their lives. And they have love. What they have received, they are willing to pass on to others

(1) We are indebted to the Rev. Keith Knight, pastor of the Keith Memorial United Methodist Church, Athens, Tennessee for three of the illustrations in this message.

(2) Tony Campolo, WHO SWITCHED THE PRICE TAGS? (Waco: Word Books, 1986).