

It is story time friends!

You can get so confused

that you'll start in to race

down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace

and grind on for miles cross weirdish wild space,

headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.

The Waiting Place...

...for people just waiting.

Waiting for a train to go

or a bus to come, or a plane to go

or the mail to come, or the rain to go

or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow

or the waiting around for a Yes or No

or waiting for their hair to grow.

Everyone is just waiting.

Waiting for the fish to bite

or waiting for the wind to fly a kite

or waiting around for Friday night

or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake

or a pot to boil, or a Better Break

or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants

or a wig with curls, or Another Chance.

Everyone is just waiting.

Today we gather to wait. This is the seventh Sunday of Easter, the Sunday after Ascension Day. As we just heard in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus is gone.

Since Jesus' resurrection, he has been with his disciples on a variety of occasions. Only a few days ago they were with him on a mountain top outside of Jerusalem. There he told them to return to the city and wait for the Holy Spirit. Then, as Luke tells us, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their site.

He was gone.

So, they returned to Jerusalem to wait. And we wait with them. Jesus has gone.

The Holy Spirit has not yet come. The only thing for them to do is to wait.

Waiting is not easy for us. The excerpt that I just read to you is from the Dr. Seuss book called "Oh the Places You'll Go"; a book for adults actually. In this book one of the places that Dr. Seuss notes that we sometime find ourselves in is called "The Waiting Place."

The Waiting Place is a place most of us, probably all of us, have been to. As Dr. Seuss notes we wait at airports and train stations, and by the phone. We wait for Friday night, for water to boil, for a new pair of pants, or Another Chance.

Speaking only for me here, it seems I will be waiting for my hair to grow for a very long time.

We are also in the Waiting Place as we sit outside the Intensive Care unit longing for news from the doctor. Close friends of mine have recently been in the Waiting Place as they went through that ninth month before the baby comes. I remember that place, ultimately not all that long ago. We are in the Waiting Place as we push through that last endless semester of school. We are there as one job ends and we wonder if we will be able to find another.

The Waiting Place is that time from when your mother or father or spouse or child is wheeled out of the room toward surgery, waiting with bated breath, until you get the call from the surgeon that everything is finished. It is where we sit at the bedside watching and waiting for death to come.

We have all been in the Waiting Place. While we are there, time seems to be suspended. Life seems to be on hold. Nothing happens. We sit or we walk, or we make small talk, or we try to read one of the magazines we found on the lobby table. And we wait.

That is where we have arrived today, with Jesus' closest friends. He is gone. The promised gift, Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, is days away, it hasn't arrived yet. We wait.

As we wait, we remember some of what Jesus says to us. The words are recorded by John which we find in our gospel lesson today. It is interesting that after we celebrated Ascension Day, our lectionary takes us back to words spoken by Jesus on the night of his crucifixion; words spoken as his waiting was almost over.

The words are in the form of a prayer to the Father. Yet, as we know, Christ is One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, why would he need to speak these words out loud? I reckon that Jesus says these words with the understanding that they would be heard and remembered. Jesus prayed, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

It seems as if Jesus’ prayer for his disciples on that fateful night was meant to resonate with them, with us, well into the future. They are meant to be remembered by his disciples as they await the culmination of his crucifixion. They are meant to be remembered as they waited in those days before Christ’s resurrection. They are meant to be remembered as they waited to see for themselves if the Good News was true. They are meant to be remembered when Christ is taken in a cloud to sit at the right hand of the Father until his coming again in glory. The Book of Acts tells us about the time in between the Ascension, when the disciples returned to Jerusalem and Mattias is named to replace Judas.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples must have been meant to be remembered while the disciples sat in the Waiting Place until the Coming of the Holy Spirit.

As followers of Christ, his prayer is also meant for us, believers, disciples, as we sit in the Waiting Places of our lives.

We often think of time, of life, as somehow suspended as we sit in the Waiting Place. Life will begin again, we say, once this "whatever it is" is over.

We think of eternal life as something that will happen at some time in the future, when we die, or when Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead, when his kingdom will have no end.

But the *interesting* thing is that isn't what Jesus says. Jesus says that life, true life, eternal life, is something that is happening now. It is something that we can experience, something in which we can participate, even here in the Waiting Place.

Eternal life, Jesus tells us, is to know God. To truly live is to be in relationship with the source of all life. It is that relationship that gives *meaning and purpose to our existence*, here and now.

In the end, that is really what the coming of Jesus was all about, to bring us life. In another place in John's gospel we hear Jesus say, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son; so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." Again, he says, "I came that they (that's us folks) may have life and have it in all its fullness."

For most of us, most of the time, we are not in the Waiting Place. When we are not attentively waiting and preparing to encounter Christ, the attractions of our lives can distract us from what we really need. The lures of excess wealth, of success, of honor, of physical attractiveness, of power, can command our attention and energy.

Yet, none of these quests can ultimately *fully* satisfy our thirst and hunger. As Augustine of Hippo said in the early centuries of the Church: "You made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." The gift of the Waiting Place is that there, distraction does not satisfy. In the Waiting Place, excess wealth, success, a good name, power, all of it is useless. They turn to dust in our hands. In the Waiting Place we are stripped of all illusion of our own self-sufficiency. In the Waiting Place we realize our own helplessness, our own loneliness. But as we wait in the Waiting Place, we have Jesus' promise: "I will come again." Although we await the coming of Christ at the eschaton, the beautiful and Holy Mystery of our faith, assures us that Jesus is with us as we wait.

Jesus waits with us. He waits for us to open our eyes, our hearts, our minds, our souls. He waits for every fiber of our being to look up and *see him here with and amongst us*. He waits for us to see him so that he can give us the gift that he has come to bring. **That gift is life.** Life that fills, life that transforms, life that renews, life that brings meaning and purpose and joy.

True life. Abundant life. Eternal life. **Even in the Waiting Place.**