

Sermon for Pentecost IXC 2025
Waiting for the Unexpected Hour

Be like those waiting for their master to return . . .

One reality of life is waiting . . .

Waiting for someone to show up,
for something to happen,
for things to change.

Another reality of life is that most of us do not like waiting.

We look for the shortest line at the grocery store or the bank.

We become impatient, maybe even a bit angry, waiting for the doctor
or the waiter who is slow or inattentive.

And just look how we behave when an elevator is slow to arrive or begin
moving or when a vending machine is slow to deliver.

Lots of buttons are being pushed—the machine's and ours.

Sometimes it seems like life is nothing more than waiting.

As children we wait for Christmas or summer vacation or to grow up.

When we grow up we wait for the just the right job
or that special person who will make our life complete,
or a promotion or retirement.

Sometimes we wait for a diagnosis, and then wait for a cure.

Sometimes we wait for the day the pain will stop and the grief will end.

We wait for the answers to our prayers.

Many wait for that day when there is enough time, enough money,
enough freedom, and the day we all live happily ever after.

Many of us wait for healing and reconciliation and the resolution of
conflict.

Sometimes it seems as if the world has waited from the beginning of
creation for peace, and the end of war and violence, hunger and poverty.

At some level waiting takes place every day.

Each of us could name the things or people for which we wait.
(I'll go first, I've often joked that if I had a dime for every minute I've had to wait for my husband for these many years . . . well, let's say I'd have plenty to retire on.)

Sometimes we live with the overwhelming feeling of waiting but with no clear idea of what we are waiting for.

When I look at my waiting,
I realize that often I don't wait in the present.
I either move into the past or into the future.
The great tragedy is that in doing so, I lose the present moment.
That's part of what makes waiting so painful and difficult.

Waiting in the future most often brings fear and anxiety about what will happen or even dreading what we know will eventually happen.
We are haunted by the unknown and the lack of control.
Waiting in the past brings sadness, anger or guilt about things that have happened or things done or left undone.

Yet as difficult as our present circumstances may be,
that's the only place where we can ever be fully alive.
It is the only place we can truly experience God.

When we move out of the present—either into the past or the future—we not only postpone life, we deny life.
We deny the preciousness and the sacrament of the present moment.
And we have refused the gift of God's kingdom.

Everyone, everywhere, in every age waits.
Jesus does not eliminate waiting.
If anything it sounds like just the opposite.
He tells the crowd: *Be like those waiting for their master to return.*

But this is not about passing time.
It is about presence and being present.

Jesus sees waiting as an act of faith, an exercise in faithfulness—the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

So we are mistaken if we think today's gospel describes an absent God, a God who left some time ago for whom we wait.

We are equally mistaken if we think we are waiting for a God whom we will meet only sometime in the future.

In the gospel for today, Jesus is teaching us how and where to wait. He's inviting us to be present to the One who is always already present. He's inviting us to listen for the know, to watch and to be alert. He's inviting us to be present to the reality of God in each other, in the world, and within ourselves.

God is present in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, even in our waiting.

We might be tempted to ask, "So where is God in all our waiting?" But maybe the better question is, "Where are we?"

During one of our Youth Gathering events, one of the questions we would ask during our devotional time was, "Where did you see Jesus today?" One of the teens in our group cried out, "You mean he was here today?!"

Jesus responds to our surprise and our disbelief, "Yes! I was here! I am here! And I will be here!"

And so he says: *Be dressed for action.*
Something is going on right now. Right here.
And I want you to be a part of it.
Come participate.
For it is God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
This is for you.

*Have your lamps lit, he says.
There is something to see.
Move out of the darkness.
Come into the light.
See what is right in front of you, what is all around you,
and what is in within you.
For God wants you to have the kingdom now.*

*Be alert, he commands.
This isn't a threat of punishment.
It's an invitation to be blessed.
Blessed are those whom he finds alert.*
Jesus is not just inviting us to be awake, to be ready, and to be watchful.
He is calling us to be fully alive and to remain alive.
Blessing and life are synonymous in God's kingdom.
It is as if Jesus is saying to us,
"Be alert, be blessed, and I will come and serve you.
I will feed you the bread of life.
I will serve you the cup of salvation."

All of this, Jesus says, happens at an unexpected hour.
Like a thief in the night,
the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.
So when is the unexpected hour?
When will all this happen?
I believe that the most unexpected hour is today, right here, right now.

The most unexpected hour is the hour spent in the hospital waiting room
or the hour sitting next to the phone waiting for news of a loved one;
the hour praying for a miracle;
the hour in which we wait for clarity and a way forward;
the hour waiting for the grief to end and life to return to normal;
the hour in which it seems as if nothing is happening,
life is not the way we want it to be and there is nowhere to go.
You mean he was here today?!
Yes! Right here in the most unexpected hour of your life.