

Sacred Waiting

Isaiah 58:1-9a

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ February 6, 2026 ~ Trinity Presbyterian Church



¹Shout out; do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
²Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced
righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they want God on their side.
³“Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day
and oppress all your workers.
⁴You fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
⁵Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
⁶Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
⁹Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, “Here I am.”
(Isaiah 58:1-9a, NRSVUE)



Let's start this morning with a little game called *Advertising Slogans from the 1980's*. Can you finish this phrase?

Good things... (come to those who wait).

Heinz came up with this in 1987 to say to people, “Look, you can have ketchup that comes quickly, but we think we have something that has more substance, more heart, better ingredients, more fullness. It's better. But you'll have to wait for it.

God has really been trying to get my attention about **patience** the past couple of weeks.

We have been talking about the Fruits of the Spirit with the Kid's Club this past season – most recently about *patience*. We are also *waiting* for a couple weeks between a series on community and the beginning of a season *of* waiting called Lent. Last week, Reverend Rick had this easy-to-remember acronym in his message:

PBPGINFWMY

(*Please be patient, God is not finished with me yet*).

Then, trying to figure out the direction for this week, I read the lectionary readings for today, particularly this passage from Isaiah.

There seems to be a deep longing in the Israelites for God to show up.

And...there is definitely a deep longing in people today, in 2026, for God to hear us...and to show up. So, God seemed to be pushing me to carry on this theme of waiting for God.

I've talked to a number of people that are struggling with faith in God right now. Essentially, they are saying, “How can I follow and trust in a God that seems to be doing nothing to help our world right now?”

Maybe a response that might come out of Isaiah 58 is a shortened version of the acronym:

PBPGINFY (*Please be patient, God is not finished... yet*). It doesn't solve the crisis of faith, but maybe by reading together and talking together we get a chance to put on a different set of glasses about the uncertainty of *what* God is up to, but the certainty that God *is, in fact*, up to something. So these are the glasses I'm inviting you into.

Honestly, I feel like I'm the last one that should be preaching on patience, which perhaps makes me the best one to preach on patience. I am not a naturally patient person.

I'm pretty sure my dog is more patient than I am, and you should see the way he whines and stamps his feet if he hears the words "go for a walk".

I have a friend that used to love finding traffic jams. He would look for traffic alerts and go find it, and just sit in the traffic. That is just not me. I am always looking around for an alternate route through a side street, parking lot, or anything to get around a traffic jam.

I remember one Thanksgiving trying to cross the mountain pass in Washington to get home, and we hit a wall of vehicles right on top of the pass. It looked like it was going to be one of those sit-for-hours situations. So I told my co-pilot, Wendy, about a hiking trip I had taken in the area – that I knew of a road that connected two freeway on-ramps, that contoured the side of the mountain "just up there". We had been following this unmistakable big yellow truck – bright yellow. And without waiting for a vote, I veered around that truck and headed for the forest road. At first, it was so satisfying to be moving along watching the standstill just below us. But then, the road switchbacked the opposite direction. The snow got thicker. The road got slicker. And the eyes of everyone in the car felt like darts on me. There was no turning back now. Pride kicked in. Thankfully, the road wound back down toward the freeway, and we could see that traffic was flowing better now. Of course, it was an hour later. So we crossed over the freeway to find our way on. And, there, just in front of us, was the bright yellow truck. We were three cars behind where we had been. It could have been so much worse – *and*, it could've been a lot less stressful with some patience.

We live in a world that is increasingly telling us to be less satisfied with waiting. Find every short cut. Try every life hack. And if you do have to wait, find a way to fill the time. Whatever you do, don't just sit there embracing the present moment or looking for a way to connect with God or another human being.

At the same time, it feels like we're living in a time when God is asking us to wait more and more. We are having a hard time even believing what we hear going on in the world.

You know how I know we are living in difficult times? When this can bring me to tears: Lady Gaga singing "Won't You Be My Neighbor". She said, "Mr. Rogers stood for something - [that human connection is everything] - and it's powerful to think what he would say right now."¹

The first thing we notice when we look at our scripture today is loudness! It begins with a "Shout!" God does not want us to miss this! God wants Isaiah's words here to be like a trumpet blast.

By the way, the hebrew horn referred to was called a *shofar*, an instrument you can't really ignore. John Oswalt says about the shofar that is was "the primary device used to gain communitywide attention in Israel, whether for alarm or communal activity. It's piercing blast was a sign to stop all other activity and pay attention."²

Maybe Isaiah 58, coming to us at such a time as this, is meant to get us to stop...and wait on God...patiently, as we let God's Spirit lead us into the next steps.

And here's the ironic thing. The people of the House of Jacob, these Israelites that Isaiah is shouting to? They *believe* they have waited patiently. This whole conversation centers around their practice of *fasting*, which is in itself, a spiritual form of waiting. In fact, God even calls out the value of what they are doing when he says,

*Day after day they seek me.
They delight to know my ways.*

"People, O my poor people, I see you want your heart in the right place." Like any good critic, God starts with the positive.

You delight to know my ways...

And then he says...

AS IF...

(When I was a kid back in the 80's, we used the phrase "as if" to talk back to our parents. Today kids say "whatever", we said, "as if...")

You're seeking after me AS IF you were a nation that practiced righteousness.

AS IF you wanted me on your side.

God wanted them to know their hearts *were* in fact in the right place. Their reasons for fasting were in the wrong place. They needed a shift in motivation.

Faith church and community - you should hear this affirmation as well. It's clear that our frustration with the world, and devotion to God, our care for each other, all of it points to hearts that are in the right place. My prayer is that our hearts and minds have enough humility to accept wherever God's spirit takes us this morning in how we wait on God.

² Oswalt, John N., *New Interpretation on the Old Testament: Isaiah*. Pg 495.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3o5FIXoK84> (Lady Gaga sings "Won't You Be My Neighbor")

Fasting, in this situation, is just misunderstood waiting. They've been calling out to God wondering why God has not taken notice, not taken any action. They were wanting God's attention. They were wanting others to take notice of them. In the end, they got God's attention. But God was saying back to them: *I want your attention.*

God wants them to first remember his promise, and he wants their fasting to have an impact on the people around them. They were fighting just for fighting sake (*to quarrel and to fight*). They were pushing so hard on their own agendas that they were neglecting those closest to them (*their own workers and families were being oppressed, and they weren't noticing it*).

As Christians, no matter the generation or location, we have this temptation to allow our faith practices to become transactional with God.

If I go to church regularly, pray consistently, tithe every month, and sing in the choir (no offense to our choir, it's just an example, and you are fantastic)... If you become a pastor (is that better?)... If I just do my Christian duty, post the right Christian memes and stories, and then have a great quiet time... God will restore the circumstances around me. But it doesn't work that way. It's not transactional.

And we are left with moments in our lives when we cry out: *God, why am I doing all of these things?! Are you asleep? Are you even listening to my prayers and the prayers of my church family?*

So the first thing God does is scold his people, because they want a shortcut. It's a repeated story throughout Scripture. Now, sometimes God surprises his people and gives them a real shortcut. He parted the Red Sea so that they could cross on dry land. That was way faster. Then he said, okay, now just kind of hang out and wander around for 40 years before you actually go into the promised land. Most of you won't be alive when it happens. Good luck with that.

So many of God's promises are for things to be made years and years in the future. Isaiah is constantly reminding people that a Messiah is coming. God speaks so much hope about peace and renewal through Isaiah to his people. But it would be more than 700 years before that would be realized.

So we are asked to wait. And our waiting should be one in which we put on these glasses of patience and trust the greater, and often much longer work that God is up to. When we put these glasses on, and trust that process, God is gracious, and gives us little glimpses and moments where we see some evidence of that work.

And that evidence becomes those very things that God talks about here (through Isaiah) that should be the result of our fasting, the result of our waiting. We will know we are being patient and waiting on the Lord when we see these things happening around us, and we can know without a doubt it is only because God is working through us. We stop our fighting and quarreling, we stop our own injustice to others, we pause for a moment our clenched fists wondering where God is, and we step into others' lives, maybe just one on one, and see one of these things happening.

What are those things? Isaiah makes it pretty clear:

- To loose the bonds of injustice
- To undo the straps of the yoke
- To let the oppressed go free

What if at the moment when someone thought the walls were closing in for good, they walked over to Bethany Presbyterian Church on the last Saturday of the month and a group of followers of Christ offers prayer or friendship or clothing or a meal and this person walks away with some hope and a much needed win. (For those that don't know, this is ministry you can be part of here). I mention this as one of many, many ways I *have* seen people turn away from impatient waiting to sacred waiting. When that happens, bonds of injustice loosen just a little bit.

Be encouraged!

Be reminded!

Let it trickle into our daily lives.

What else does sacred waiting look like?

- To share bread with the underfed
- To welcome the underhoused
- To clothe the underdressed

We look around and see so many that are in difficult places. And some of us feel like this some days as well. It's too overwhelming. God is asking for us to move the issue of poverty from the realm of societal issues, at least for a moment, and to make it personal.

But God is up to something. And if we're patient with God's plan, even when it seems way too slow, we may be able to do something, however small, for *someone*. To simply be aware.

Perhaps you heard of the story recently of the man with a 98 year old neighbor, and he saw him slumped over in his car last week when the temperatures were well below zero, and the power was off in the whole city. He saw him in his car out the window, so he took some hot soup. On the video you could hear him say to himself as he approached the car, "Please be alive, please be alive." When he got there, this old man said he was just staying warm and charging his phone. So they both got

back in the car, and they shared hot soup and conversation together.³

Walter Brueggemann comments about this passage that “the prophet dismantles any notion that worship can substitute for neighborly responsibility.”⁴

Tim Keller says it so simply: *A heart truly captured by God's grace becomes deeply concerned with justice for the poor.*⁵

And one more evidence of sacred waiting in verse 7 - *not to hide yourself from your own kin.*

When the world gets particularly tough - tough enough to make us angry and want change, and want it quickly - the ones that often end up losing out on our attention? The people we are most closely related to. Our own kin. Our families. But these are the times we need to lean in like never before to love those that God has given to us most closely. Maybe talk less politics, play more games, take more walks together.

So, God has redefined for his people what fasting should look like...what our sacred waiting on God should bring about.

I will admit, as a pastor I often struggle, especially in more difficult times in our world with what to do. Part of me wants to just hang my head and pray, and carry on with my duties quietly in the church and encourage all of *you* to hear where God is leading you.

It seems clear from the first word of this passage “shout” to this evidence of true fasting that God also doesn’t intend for us to sit idly by where he offers clear opportunities of stepping out courageously.

I’ve tried to wait patiently. I’m so bad at it. I hide away silently, or I run too quickly ahead in my own power. But in trying to live into this sacred waiting, an opportunity did present itself recently that I don’t think I should ignore. An organization is looking for pastors and other faith leaders who will be trained to simply show up and accompany immigrants to important appointments or court dates. The hope is to offer a friend during a very scary process. I don’t know much. But I signed up to find out more. We’ll see if this is me running ahead of God or waiting patiently.

Can you see the parallel of Isaiah 58 to Jesus’ teaching and life? Jesus declares over and over in the Sermon on the Mount about many things: “You’ve heard it said...but now I say to you.” Once again he’s saying

your heart is in the right place, but don’t miss the real point of it all. Jesus, too, comes to redefine our Christian walk and help us return to a patient, obedient waiting, but one that is truly receiving God’s grace.

Then, Jesus calls us to a life of justice in the story of the sheep and goats, when he says, when you’ve done these things for the least of these, you’ve done them for me.

I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was in prison or sick and you visited me. I was naked and you clothed me. (Sound familiar?). And the people say, “When did we do these things?” Jesus says, “When you did these for the least of these, you did them for me.”

And when this happens, we become what Jesus said we already are, that Jeff preached about just 3 weeks ago: The light of the world.

Listen to verse 8 in our passage today:

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn.

(Don’t assume Isaiah is talking about God’s light. No, that’s us! God’s light, but reflected through our sacred waiting)

And your healing shall spring up quickly.

Your vindicator shall go before you; and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;

I’ve saved the best line for last. It’s a promise we don’t have to wait for 40 years, or 700 years as we wait with our glasses of God’s eventual renewal. It’s a promise that is for the present moment that is repeated here, and in the desert, and as Jesus’ last words to his disciples:

You shall cry for help, and God will say, “Here I am.”

For the next 700 years God’s people will have these words as a reminder that even in the worst of the worst situations and uncertainty, they can be sure that God walks with them. God said “Here I am” in the flame and the cloud that went before the people wandering in the desert. God said, “Here I am” at Pentecost when we were given this incredible gift of God’s presence that goes with us right now, today, and forever.

WE MAY NOT SEE THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYERS IN OUR LIFETIME - but we trust anyway. Though we like to think so...It’s really not about us.

The world and even many groups of Christians want to lead us down spirals of fear and retaliation and hateful

³ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/FTcf2iqm924>

⁴ Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now.* (John Knox Pres, 2014)

⁵ Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God's grace makes us just.* (Dutton, 2010)

response. In our waiting, it's okay to simply say, "God's got this." It may sound trite. That doesn't make it untrue.

Every time we worship together and celebrate the Lord's Supper together - every time we loosen the grip of injustice - every time we offer food to a hungry person - every time we love those in our own homes - we say "God is here" to one another.

I want to close with a poem that was in the last scene of a television series I recently watched. It was based on a book about someone who goes back in time to change something that they assume will make the world right in the present day. I don't want to spoil too much.

There are seasons and times in history in which we are tempted to fantasize the possibility of going back to change one history-changing moment in hopes that it would make things better in the future. That isn't exactly how the story ends.

Instead, we are left for this moment with the world...as it is...Here's the poem:

*We did not ask for this room or this music. We were invited in. Therefore, because the dark surrounds us, let us turn our faces to the light. Let us endure hardship to be grateful for plenty. We have been given pain to be astounded by joy. We have been given life to deny death. We did not ask for this room or this music. But because we are here, let us dance.*⁶

I shared these words with our youth recently that have stuck with me:

IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, DO WHAT YOU KNOW...
IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, DO WHAT YOU KNOW...

Jesus is pretty clear what we can do while we wait. So is Isaiah. And in case we need it, we have a constant reminder on the side of our building that sums it all up, every time we drive into the church parking lot.



Amen.



1. Read Isaiah 58:1-9a together aloud. Which verse in this passage is the most challenging for you? Which is the most encouraging?
2. When do you see yourself as a patient person? When are you impatient?
3. What do you find yourself longing for or waiting for God to do in our world? In your life?
4. Why do the people of the house of Jacob feel justified in their fasting? Why do their actions seem to them to be the right way to wait?
5. What does God want the fasting (or waiting) of his people to look like? After you share some thoughts, read Matthew 25:37-40. How do Jesus' words seem to reflect God's words through the prophet Isaiah?
6. The New Testament is pretty clear and consistent about what Christians are waiting for. Different writers say it differently, but it all circles around the same hope. What would you say we are ultimately waiting for as God's people? (Some helpful passages: Philippians 3:20; 2 Peter 3:13; Hebrews 9:28; Luke 12:35-36; James 5:7-8.)
7. In times of uncertainty when we are unsure about how best to respond, what actions can we be sure we are called to take while we wait on God?
8. Close your time together with a reading of Lamentations 3:16-24 and offer any final reflections.

TABLE TO TABLE: What is easy for you to wait for? What is hard to wait for? Talk with your family about what it means to "wait for God" and how you can do that together.

⁶ King, Stephen. 11/22/63.