

What Are You Waiting For?
Isaiah 25:6-9

There I was waiting in line in the freezing cold. I didn't think I'd be waiting outside so I wasn't wearing that heavy of a jacket. I didn't have gloves but I did have a hat. My hands were getting so cold that I could barely move them but I didn't dare step out of line. What had I gotten myself into? There were probably 40 or 50 people ahead of me, the line getting longer behind me. I didn't get there as soon as I wanted to. A person who wasn't in the know, who didn't know what was going on, what this line was all about looked at us standing there in line and asked the obvious question. What are you waiting for? What could possibly be worth the wait? I understood the question. It seems kind of odd to be standing in a line, wrapped around a building during the wee hours of a Friday morning. But they didn't know that this wasn't just a random Friday. It was Black Friday and I was standing in a line with a mixed group of people waiting for a particular beer to be released. Every Black Friday in November, Goose Island Brewing in Chicago releases an imperial stout that spent the last year aging in bourbon barrels in their warehouse on Fulton Ave. This stout, along with variations of that special beer is called Bourbon County Brand Stout. It is a special release so you have to get in line and get there early to make sure you get it. If you don't know the beer scene. If you don't know anything about beer then you are curious when you see these lines forming around liquor stores all across the suburbs, really all across the country. These outside observers ask the question that is obvious to them but dumb to those in line. What in the world are you waiting for? Is it really worth your time? Whatever waits for you at the front of this line. Is it worth it?

Now, you may think its pretty silly to wait in line, in the cold, for hours for beer but I'm sure there are things you've waited in line for too. You've waited in line for concert tickets, for movie releases, for rare opportunities to see or do something that you value. You wait in line to get into venues. You wait in line to get into events. You wait in line to purchase a particular product. The lines are famous for Black Friday sales or the latest Apple product to be released. We've all waited for something and it isn't silly if we truly value it. Unless you are in the know you see people in these lines, stuck in these states of waiting and you wonder. What are they waiting for? What waits at the end of the line. What awaits them when they finally get to the front of the line and is it worth it?

Well, this is exactly what comes to mind when reading Isaiah today. What are we waiting for? What is waiting there for God's people when the time finally comes? That is all I can think of when I read the text for us today from Isaiah 25. Now, before I get into everything that we are waiting for, I want to tell you why "wait" is the word that keeps coming up for me. At the end of our reading that you just heard, the people of God respond to what God has done and joyfully declare, "this is our God, we have waited for him." This is our God who we have waited for. "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." So today we are going to talk about waiting. Yes, we can touch on the waiting period that we are in. That's important to mention but more importantly I want to focus on what we are waiting for. I want to fix our eyes on that for which we wait because a lot of people look at Christians and they wonder. What are you waiting for? What is your hope? What do you think lies at the end of your journey. When you die. When you face your Creator what is it that you are hoping to see. I think, actually I know without a doubt that Isaiah shows us the answer to those questions. He gives us a crystal clear picture of what we are waiting for. This thing, these events for which we wait can bring us great joy during the waiting. We can find great comfort, relief and hope in what Isaiah shows us. This is the thing that we are waiting for.

We can talk about the waiting period for just a moment first because acknowledging our world today as we wait makes us long for what waits for us even more. Seeing the world as it is in our waiting makes us long for what the future will bring for those in Christ. You and I are in waiting. We're waiting in this lifetime for Jesus to return. The church has been waiting for this return since Jesus ascended forty days after his resurrection. The church has been waiting for Jesus to return just as he left for 2000 years. The message to the church since that moment

has been pretty simple. Stay faithful. Stand firm. You could put it even more simply than that: just hold on. As you think about life. As you look at the world around you, you begin to realize why that message is what it is. That is the message because we deal with a lot of stuff. Our lives are turbulent. Our world is chaotic. We deal with a lot of things and things that not only attack our faith but also our physical and mental well being. All of that is a result of being in a sinful world. All of that is a result of sin in us and against us as we wait. So life, in a lot of ways, is a lot of waiting.

In our waiting we know we aren't supposed to be just twiddling our thumbs. God calls his children to act on his behalf, to be his representatives as we wait. We are called to love one another, serve one another, expand the kingdom of God, share the gospel message of Jesus with anyone who will hear it. We are supposed to share the reason for the hope that we have. That is our call and responsibility as we wait. But some days it gets pretty tough. Some days as we wait it gets very difficult. It's hard being a Christian in this world. It's hard when our values don't line up with what the world professes to be true. It's hard when our worldview doesn't align with the opinions and thoughts of the world. It gets very difficult to be holy, to be a set apart people in a world that is just so destructive and dangerous. It's hard. It's hard to be faithful because it isn't just attacks for what we believe but it is the every day temptations that attempt to pull us away from our Good Shepherd. There's a lot of danger in the waiting.

There's also a lot of heartache in the waiting. I bet any number of us in this room can talk about the physical aches and pains we feel in our bodies. The surgeries we've gone through. The things we've seen loved ones go through. Whether it is bodies slipping or minds slipping, the ever present reality of death creeps in like a cold fog over each one of us eventually. There's a lot of heartbreak in the waiting. Not only is it the pains we feel in our bodies and minds. It is the death that comes to get us all. Death is the ultimately agony that we wrestle with, that we mourn over, that we try to suppress and push through in the waiting. Tom Petty said it best: the waiting is the hardest part. And that is particularly true of us Christians as we wait for our Lord and Savior, our rescuer and redeemer to come back for us. So we look with hopeful yet heavy eyes to the heavens for Jesus' return when he will make it all better.

We know what we are called to do in the waiting. We know what life is like as we wait. But what is it that we are waiting for. What is it as we stand around? What is it that we are waiting for and is it worth it? As we struggle to remain faithful. As we face our own doubts and depression. Is it worth it at the end of the day? To remain faithful. To hold fast. To stay strong in our faith. Is it worth it? Isaiah has an answer for us. God has a definitive solution for us and Isaiah lays it out plainly. This is our God, we have waited for him. This scene on the mountain. This scene on the Lord's mountaintop is exactly what we are waiting for. This scene is the hope we profess in all aspects of life but it is particularly helpful at the loss of a loved one. This is an incredibly hopeful message at a funeral. This is what we are hoping for in our confusion and doubt. This is what we are waiting for as we put loved ones in the ground. This is what waits for us and all those who have hoped in the Lord.

"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken." Do you hear what's happening on that mountain? Do you see all that is offered to us as God's children. A feast. Fine wine. The choicest meat. The most extravagant spread you've ever seen. The entire family of God, spanned over centuries, seated there together. We'll be shoulder to shoulder with the people we worship with now. We'll be passing plates, family style with family we had said goodbye to so long ago. A feast with not just the best food or the best drink, better than any beer you'd ever wait in line for, but with the company of all the saints. You'll be in the company of every believer who has ever died waiting for that day.

And if that's not amazing enough. While we are sitting there, stuffing ourselves with the most amazing meal with the most amazing people, God is destroying death forever. It's dinner and a show. As we sit there, kicked back, filling our bellies with the richest of God's Kingdom,

God is busy doing the hard work of casting off death forever. The veil that is spread over all nations is gone forever. As we eat, we raise a glass to the work that God has done. We cheer and toast our savior Jesus who has accomplished this through his death and resurrection. We celebrate. This is what we've been waiting for. This is worth every high and low that we endured in our lives. This is worth every temptation we resisted. This is what we waited for. This is our God. We have waited for him. Can you even imagine it? Can you even fathom such a thing?

Yet, there's more. Just when you think you've had your fill. Just when you think you've seen everything your eyes and your mind can comprehend God leans over us and wipes the tears from our eyes. When we see death it still brings a little fear. It still pulls painful memories that we thought were gone. It still brings a chill, a shiver, tears. But when God officially chases away the shadows of death with his glorious light. He comes back to the table where we are all gathered and he wipes our tears away and says, "never again". And I'll tell you what, that is what I'm waiting for. That is what I long for because I've lost too much. I've mourned too many. We have buried too many of our own. We've stood over too many bedsides, too many gravesides wondering what in the world we are going to do next. We've wandered this world too aimlessly. We've been waiting so long. So I look with eager anticipation to that day. I cling with desperation to that hope. I long for that feast, for the restoration of relationships long lost, the resurrection of bodies long buried. I ache for that mountain where our Almighty God snuffs out death forever. I have a belly that growls in expectation of that feast. I have tears that still need to be wiped away.

This is what is to come. This is what we are waiting for. And it is worth it. You know it is because you're just like me: worn out by the sin in this world. Breathless from the sting of death puncturing my heart. We waste our time waiting for so many lesser things, things so insignificant in the grand scheme of eternity. We hope for so many silly and powerless things. We long for things we think are more tangible, more possible. Stop such endless pursuits. Stop looking to things that won't last, that won't live up to the hype. Stop putting your hope in hopeless places that will only crush and disappoint. Please, when things feel hopeless. When you feel lost or lonely or overwhelmed or depressed or desperate. When you don't know where else to look. Look to that mountain. Listen to those words from Isaiah that are just dripping with hope. A feast prepared. A family reunited. A veil removed. Tears dried up by the very hand of God. I cannot wait for that day. I can't tell you how much I need it and I can't tell you how excited I am to see death defeated once and for all. At that sight we shall proclaim with exhausted joy in unison with the saints throughout time, "this is our God, we have waited for him." Amen.