

I don't know about you, but I would not consider myself a particularly patient person. This is certainly an area of growth that I have been working on throughout my life. I also see this characteristic in my own son. I think it is hard for me to be patient because I am a person who wants to act, someone who wants to make a difference now. It is hard for me to wait to do something that I feel very passionate about.

Most recently, this trait reared its ugly head when I should have waited to send an email. I did not have all the information I needed to send it out and I ended up creating a logical mess and causing confusion for a team I serve on. If I only would have waited to receive all the information, I would not have made such a mess. Luckily for me I am blessed to serve with forgiving people who helped me clean up the mess.

Has this every happened to you? Maybe it was in a team project, or something someone promised you they would do, but it was just not getting done so you decided to go ahead and do it yourself?

I am sure at some point we have all struggled with being impatient, and yet, as Christians we are people who have been called every day to wait upon the Lord.

On this the sixth Sunday of Easter, we celebrate Ascension Sunday. What is interesting about Ascension Sunday is that “when John Wesley edited the English Book of Common Prayer for use by Methodists, he generally deleted most holy days that did not fall on Sundays. Ascension Day is one of only three he did not delete.”ⁱ This is significant for us as United Methodists because on this day we celebrate the ascension of Jesus Christ and his continual reign as Lord over our lives.

The ascension of Jesus is not only important to us, but you will find it “affirmed in all the ecumenical creeds.”ⁱⁱ You have heard these before:

The Nicene Creed: “...On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The Apostles' Creed: “I believe...in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;* the third day he rose from the dead;

he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”^{iv}

In these ecumenical creeds you see the universal truths of Christianity, and Christ’s ascension is one of them.

Ascension is not something that only happened in the New Testament. Who could forget Elijah’s ascension with a chariot and horses of fire in 2 Kings 2? I mean talk about a dramatic exit. In the moment of Elijah’s ascension, his pupil, Elisha had a decision to make...to continue in Elijah’s footsteps or to go a different way.

Elisha chose to follow Elijah by picking up his mantle. What was this mantle? Commentary tells us: “In biblical times, a mantle was typically a large, loosely fitting garment made of animal skin, probably sheepskin.”^v So this mantle had a dual function: to protect the prophet from the elements as well as to be worn to signify to others that this person was called by God. Throughout the Bible, we see others wearing this important garment of clothing: Job, Ezra, and Samuel all wore mantles, and we even see John the Baptist roll into town wearing a mantle, showing that he too was a prophet preparing the way for God.^{vi}

Before Elijah’s ascension, his pupil, Elisha, asked for a double portion of his spirit. Upon his ascension, this gift of his spirit was granted as others recognized in the Bible that the spirit of Elijah was upon Elisha. This is an important parallel to our Scripture today about the disciples who were waiting for the coming of the Spirit, a gift promised from Jesus Christ so they could continue their ministry.

Just as the passing of the mantle from Elijah to Elisha marked a change in leadership, Jesus’ ascension marked for the disciples, the moment where it was now up to them to continue to build up the kingdom of God on earth.

We see from this moment on their behavior changed. Worshipping God in the temple became an important part of their day. They were no longer confused about what was happening. They clearly knew their purpose and they were ready to serve. They were no longer sad as they were not mourning Jesus’ death. They were happy about Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and promised return.

While the ascension was a happy event for the disciples, it also marked a time of waiting. Jesus’ disciples finally understood who Jesus was and why he came to give up life for us, and they were ready to go out and share the good news, but now they had to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Waiting is what we have been doing this season of Easter. We lie in wait for 50 days, celebrating the risen Christ, and awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. I imagine it must have been hard for the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. They now understood their purpose, but they could not yet fully live into God’s calling upon their lives.

As Christians, we live in a perpetual time of waiting. Every day we wait for the return of the promised Messiah. We wait for God to reveal to us decisions we should make. We wait upon God as we await hearing good or bad news in our lives. It is hard to wait.

We hear in our Old Testament lesson from the book of Isaiah 40:30-31 a lesson on waiting: “Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

How have you been called to wait on the Lord? Are you waiting to make an important decision? Are you continuing to discern what God is calling you to do as you care for a loved one?

Just as Isaiah reminds us, when we wait upon God our strength is renewed. We wait upon God when we spend time in prayer with God. This is what the disciples were doing as they spent time in the temple.

Prayer is vital to our faith and our relationship with God. As we pray, God reveals things to us. As we pray, we are comforted. As we pray, we surrender the many things that get in our relationship with God and other people. As we pray, we are renewed.

Sometimes it is hard to wait. Sometimes it is hard to pray. I know for myself, being an impatient person, I want answers now! I want to understand God’s plan for my life and life of the church today. In Christ’s ascension we are once again reminded that we are not God, and we are called to surrender to our creator who reigns over all things.

Sometimes we are picky about the areas we want God to reign over in our lives. We say, Jesus, you can be Lord over my life on Sunday mornings, and maybe on one evening during the week, but the rest of the time I’ve got this God.

What would it look like to fully surrender our whole lives to God?

Surrendering our lives to God is not something we do one time. It is something we do over and over and over again. For me this surrender is often forced by God and not something I want to do on my own.

When I applied for ordination, I had a moment like this. I thought I would go right through the process and pass in the allotted time. I thought all my interviews went well. Then I got the phone call. The one where the team leader told me that I had not passed my theology exam because they were not able to hear my own theological voice and thought I had drawn from too many other sources.

I was devastated. To make matters worse most of my friends made it through on the first round and that year at Annual Conference they had an ordination choir. It was torture to say the least.

I had to wait a whole additional year to be ordained. Another year of retreats and papers and study. But even in this painful waiting God was working on me. God revealed to me I did have some things to work on. So, one day something clicked inside of me. Instead of feeling sorry for myself and wallowing in the pain of my failure, with God’s help I moved forward.

I worked on my own theological voice. I studied the bible, theological books, and taught a Bible study on theology. I spent more time in prayer than I ever did before. And when I went to that interview the second time, the team was questioning why I was continued the first time.

Even though none of us want to experience hurt or failure in our lives, sometimes it is in these moments, that we surrender our lives to God, fully being aware of our humanity. Now God did not cause me to be held back a year, that was on me, but God did use this time of waiting to continue to form and fashion me into the person I am today. A few years later I was asked to serve on the very same board that continued me.

Now I sit across from pastors as I serve on the theology committee and I help make those choices of whether someone is ready to move straight through, or whether another year in the process is beneficial. Now I can come to those conversations with wisdom and life experience and help others as they continue to answer God’s calling upon their lives. It is interesting how things work out sometimes isn’t it?

As we continue to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit with the disciples, there are still things we are called to do right now. One of my favorite things that we are called to do during the season of Easter is to rejoice. We take 50 days to rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Jesus came for us, died for our sins, and conquered death.

We rejoice that Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God continuing to rule over our lives. We rejoice that God gave us people to wait with, the gift of the church. The disciples did not have to wait alone, they got to wait together for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

So, in this time of waiting we rejoice for all the things God has already done. This was an important thing I learned during my year of waiting. That every day we have so much to be thankful for, but so often the beautiful things are overshadowed by the hard things in our lives.

The good news for our lives today is that we serve a God who keeps promises and who continues to reign in glory over our lives. May we not be afraid to surrender everything we have and everything we are for the glory of God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/ascension-day1>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/glossary-nicene-creed?gclid=EAIAIQobChMI7aXLieqx4gIVhYizCh3DsQAZEAAAYASAAEgIEjPD_BwE

^{iv} <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/apostles-creed-traditional-ecumenical>

Additional Resources

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/august/why-ascension-matters.html>

^v <https://www.gotquestions.org/mantle-Bible.html>

^{vi} Ibid.