

Waiting!

We chafe at waiting – always wanting to move on to the place where we've arrived
Are we there yet? How much longer?
Some waiting is ripe with anticipation – like the waiting to open Christmas gifts
Eager anticipation overwhelms us, pushing us forward into the moment of realization
Other waiting is long and seemingly without end – it is this waiting that can feel hopeless
In that waiting, we usually want to be doing something
At a minimum, doing something to distract us
But also, doing something to push things along and realize our desired outcome
In 2015 and our current world events, waiting often gives way to fear
Whether it be fear from outside forces, fear of the future, or fear from within
When we give into fear, we may sabotage the waiting
Fight or flight syndrome as we try to rush the waiting or control the outcome
The more afraid we are, the harder it is to wait

Waiting is a major theme in the Old Testament

First see the "wait" in Genesis 8—waiting for the water to recede after the flood, dove return
Abraham and Sarah waiting for the birth of a child in their old age
Waiting to leave Egypt, waiting for Moses on the mountain
Job—waiting for answer to his cries of "Why?"
David expresses his struggle in waiting throughout the Psalms
Waiting for the Messiah as promised by the prophets
Waiting in exile for return to the homeland
Some waited well – some tried to find their own fix – some gave up
In the end—we are called to the journey and the invitation to be faithful
That it is more about being faithful on the journey than it is about the answer
The human struggle is to stay present during the long wait
To find God in the midst of waiting

As we turn the page into the New Testament, we continue to find people waiting...

Zechariah and Elizabeth wait the birth of John—their first born long after they gave up hope
Mary waiting for the birth of her child
Simeon and Anna, waiting in the temple to see the promised Messiah
As they wait, they hear the words, "Do not be afraid"
These are the first words given—the answer to fear that rises—God is with us

Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna—are representatives of the waiting Israel

Waiting is the attitude of the faithful remnant of Israel—the small group that stayed faithful
How do we wait? What can these faithful representatives of Israel teach us about waiting?

They wait with a sense of promise

Luke 1:13-14 – "Zechariah,... your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son."
Luke 1:30-33 – "Mary,... Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son."
The seed of a promise has been planted and grows within them

Waiting is active

Often we think of waiting as passive—doing nothing while life passes us by
Active waiting means to be fully present to the moment—not living in the past or future

Tending to the place where God lives

I love the "I AM" banner—not "I was" or "I will be"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14 NRSV

We must stay in the present moment because that is where God lives

Waiting requires patience

Patience is the tenacity to stay present and to stay in the present moment

Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary were very present to the moment

That is why they could hear the angel

They were alert and attentive to the voice that spoke to them

"Do not be afraid..."

Waiting is open-ended

Open-ended waiting is hard—because we don't know the outcome

Often we wait for something concrete to happen

In that sense, waiting is our way of controlling the future—of moving out front of God

It is much harder to let go of the specifics and simply wait in the presence of the "I AM" God

This is the place where fear and waiting collide

Our waiting for a particular outcome leaves us disappointed when it doesn't happen

We even slip into despair and fear

Open-ended waiting lets go of the particulars and places hope in God

It is where we join Mary and say, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord;*

let it be with me according to your word." Luke 1:38 NRSV

"I have no clue what you are talking about, but I trust you with way forward"

Open-ended waiting trusts so deeply that we are open to all possibilities

Open-ended waiting gives up control and trusts God to lead us according to love and grace

This is a radical stance towards life in a world preoccupied with control

Waiting is best done in community

We wait together like Mary and Elizabeth

The angel told Mary that Elizabeth was on a parallel journey so her first action was to go see her

Elizabeth and Mary came together and allowed each other to wait

Mary's visit made Elizabeth aware of what she was waiting for as her son "leaped for joy"

In that moment, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit

Mary responded with a song of praise

During our times of waiting, we truly need each other to support, celebrate, and affirm with us

We need each other to stay true to the waiting journey—to stay present in the moment

To open ourselves to new possibilities

To encourage us when the waiting seems long

To keep us attentive and listening so that we can hear God's message to us

To hold us up when we get weary

The community of people waiting with us is so important to the journey of waiting

As together, we stand ready, stay awake, and stay tuned to the Presence of God

Romans 8:18-30 The Message Bible

[Outline and some content taken from *Finding My Way Home* by Henri Nouwen, Reprinted in *Watch for the Light*, p 27]