

Being Easter People: Wait
Luke 24:36b-49
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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A marshmallow had never looked so good. He had been allowed to pick from a variety of treats, and marshmallows were his favorite.

There it sat, that sticky, sugary, pillowy concoction. His mouth was watering as he sat there looking at it. It was so hard to resist. Maybe he should close his eyes. Maybe he should sit on his hands. Maybe he should distract himself by singing a song.

Maybe he should just eat it!

But if he waited, he would get another one. He would get TWO marshmallows. His mom never let him have two.

It couldn't be very long before the nice lady who brought him in here came back. Surely she wouldn't make him wait long.

But it just looked so good.

What should he do?

This was the dilemma of hundreds of 4 and 5-year-olds who participated in Stanford professor, Walter Mischel's, experiment about 50 years ago. While the study ended up making conclusions about the benefits of self-control, even the benefits that it had in adulthood for these children, what most of us picture when we hear of this experiment is those young children struggling to hold back, to wait a little while longer for a greater reward.

Because, as we all - even those of us who are better at practicing self-control - as we all know, waiting can be difficult. And it gets more difficult with every passing year.

There are so many things that feed our desire for instant gratification. Hungry? Drive thru at the nearest fast food restaurant. Have a question? No need to ponder the possibilities...just Google it, after all you carry a computer in your pocket. Want to lose weight? There are hundreds of lose-weight-quick programs just waiting for you.

No matter how many times our parents told us that good things come to those who wait...no matter how many times we hear beautiful quotes telling us that it's about the journey rather than the destination...still, waiting and engaging the process toward our goal is often not easy.

And when it comes to our faith, we often forget this. When it comes to the Easter story and the reality of what it was like for those early disciples to embrace resurrection, we most certainly forget this. After all, as we keep talking about this Easter season, we who live some two thousand years later forget the fear and the surprise and the mystery of the Easter proclamation. We forget that the disciples couldn't immediately understand, but had to find their way to belief.

And today's scripture seems to remind us of that.

In Luke's gospel, seemingly still on resurrection day though late that evening, the companions of Jesus are gathered. The day has been full. It began with the women going to the tomb, finding it empty, being reminded of what Jesus had said and then returning to the others with proclamations of resurrection only to not be believed.

Luke goes on and tells us that there were two - not two of the eleven, but two others of Jesus' followers - who were heading home to town about seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along a stranger joined them and while sharing a meal with them, they came to recognize him as Jesus. They couldn't wait until morning, but left home at that late hour and returned to tell the others they had seen Jesus. By the time they got back, others had seen him, too. Peter was among them.

And this appearance of Jesus that Karen shared with us this morning comes right as they are all comparing notes. "The tomb was empty"... "we didn't recognize him"... "could it really be?" Can't you almost hear them speaking over one another, trying to put the pieces of this mysterious puzzle together when suddenly, Luke tells us, Jesus entered the room?

And they were terrified. They were uncertain. It might be a ghost.

And yet Jesus met them where they were. Jesus didn't scold their disbelief, but offered them the time and space to believe. Luke tells us that he showed them his hands and feet...he invited them to touch him...he even asked for food and ate in their presence.

And often Christianity has embraced this text as being proof of a bodily resurrection. But it seems there is much more here.

After all, Jesus understood people. He knew that seeing and touching would help them believe. He knew - not that everyone had to have the same understanding of what happened to *him*, but that embracing resurrection matters...because this life matters...the human experience matters...caring for one another matters...and so resurrection, while many things, is also a divine blessing on life itself.

And Jesus knew, as Sarah S. Henrich wrote, that, "minds can not be opened when trapped by fear" (*Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 2, 429). And so he gave them what they needed to set that fear down.

And part of what he gave them was time. But again, we often forget this.

We read these stories one right after another. We go from Easter appearances to the wild and windy experience of Pentecost, and even though in the church we *do* stretch Easter out over many weeks, we often treat these stories as if they happened one day after another.

But Luke gives us a gift in the way he tells the story. Because in Luke's gospel, all the appearances happen that first day and then Jesus ascends. But he does not do so without first teaching them and giving them the instruction, "stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49b, NRSV).

Perhaps one of the most important *and* most neglected gifts of the Easter story is Jesus' instruction to stay...to wait...to be patient...to engage the journey. Because while we are given limited stories of what happened during this time, what we can infer is that the disciples spent that 50 days wondering as they waited...sharing their insights as they stayed put...being present with each other and with their memories of Jesus as they were patient.

So often we are ready to forge ahead. We jump into the next activity or opportunity or relationship, sometimes without being ready. We speak words of reaction rather than contemplating them in our hearts.

But what would happen if we learned to wait? If we chose to lean in to the opportunities for silence and contemplation? If we valued the development of our ideas and beliefs, a development that means that we will change along the way as information and experience give us insight? What would happen if we learned, as John McKinstry proposed at a Minister's Institute some years ago, to practice the "sacrament of waiting"?

I feel certain that when the day of Pentecost came...when Luke tells us the Holy Spirit exploded on the scene in a noticeable and public manner, the disciples were more ready to lead the newborn church because they had spent time waiting, reflecting, turning their understandings over again and again and being willing to see something new. They had spent time becoming the people of Jesus.

Friends, as Easter people, this is our call as well. There are many ways that our faith calls us to act, to move, to do. And we do not want to neglect those.

Meanwhile, we are our most faithful when our action and contemplation are in balance, when our faith is expressed in the ebbs and flows of acting and waiting, of declaring and considering, of doing and being.

Perhaps this past year has given us some much needed opportunities to simply be and to pay attention, to learn and to grow, to become with intention who we are shaped to be.

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May we, as people of faith, wait and watch and listen and grow, that we may faithfully live this life of divine blessing. Amen.