

## ***I Am Not In A Hurry***

*a sermon delivered by the Rev Scott Dalgarno on October 20, 2019  
based on John 11:1-16*

I want to begin with a young woman's account of the birth of her first child.

***FORTY HOURS AFTER*** *a traumatic delivery, I was sent home exhausted and in great pain, with a sick infant. Why hadn't I had the kind of wonderful birth experience everyone talked about? Why had my baby been born sick? The situation was compounded by the fact that I had few maternal instincts, and that my child was so very needy — crying incessantly and slow to heal. She wasn't the perfect baby I felt I deserved, and I wasn't the perfect mom she needed.*

*My stepsister came by to admire the baby. Cuddling her and cooing and stroking her fuzzy little head, she crooned, "Don't you just love her?" "No," I said, "but I'm hopeful. I didn't like Philip when I first met him either, and we've been married six years now."*

*She looked at me as if I really was the awful mother I believed myself to be.*

*Two years have passed since then, and sometimes when I look into my daughter's tiny face, it takes my breath away. I don't know what I've done to deserve such a wonderful child.*

*Why is love at first sight more valued than the kind that comes on slowly, picking up speed with every caress?*

"I am not in a hurry." That's my title for today. The very best things require waiting.

In this morning's text from John's gospel, Jesus is summoned by his buddies, Mary and Martha, to the bedside of their brother, Lazarus.

"Come quickly!" begs Martha, "Lazarus whom you love is ill." Jesus' response to Martha's plea for emergency medical assistance is underwhelming.

"Lazarus isn't terminal" he seems to be saying.

How does Jesus know that Lazarus isn't so sick? He's no doctor. Well, three days later, when Jesus finally makes it to Mary and Martha's, Martha gives Jesus a piece of her mind.

"It's too late for Lazarus," she says. "We dropped him into a tomb three days ago," and, she add. "Already, he smells of the grave."

So much for Jesus the physician.

When Jesus was first “messed” by Mary and Martha to rush over and heal his good friend Lazarus, the gospel says, “Jesus waited two days.”

Excuse me, but why didn't the most, arguably, compassionate man in history, rush right over and save these sisters, not to mention their brother, this grief? Isn't that our definition of friendship: a friend is someone who cares enough to drop everything and come when you call?

What was Jesus doing that was more important than aiding a friend in dire need? Was he in the middle of a lecture series and just couldn't break away?

Did he have a hundred sick people triaged ahead of Lazarus? John just says “Jesus waited two days.”

Now, of course, it's true, when Jesus finally stops whatever he's doing and gets to the cemetery he pulls off a spectacular resuscitation.

“Lazarus arise!” he says. “Unbind him! Let him go!” And Lazarus climbs out of the tomb into the fresh air, breathing again.

It's impressive. “All's well that ends well,” as Shakespeare would say.

But still, a three day delay?

Some of the early church fathers speculated that this raising of Lazarus is a pre-figuring of Jesus' resurrection. As dead Jesus lay in the tomb for three days, so does Lazarus.

Okay, but why did Jesus wait three days in the tomb before his resurrection? What was he doing those three days?

The Book of First Peter claims that dead Jesus went to Hades and preached to those who hadn't the chance to hear him in life. Odd. Still that's more explanation than John's gospel gives for Jesus' delay in aiding Lazarus.

A three-day delay in a matter of life and death? Why did Jesus make his friends wait from Good Friday to Easter for his resurrection?

“He's back!” cried the women who ran from Jesus' tomb on Easter. “Where has he been since Friday?” asks the church.

I believe, as scripture attests, that God is love, and also that God is love *pro nobis*, that is to say, “for us.” But why the wait? Why this wasted time; why the hopeless despair, the unanswered questions? What good is God's goodness if it is goodness postponed?

You know, the time between the Hebrew people's going into slavery, to the day God delivered them was about four hundred years.

Exodus begins with God appearing to Moses in the burning bush, "I am the God of your forefathers. I have heard the cry of my people. I have come down to deliver them from the hand of Pharaoh."

And though it is not found in your Bibles, Moses responded, "It's about time! We've been slaves for four hundred years. I mean, don't rush right over!"

Waiting.

I know someone who has prayed to God every day for deliverance from relentless and painful arthritis that has plagued her since she was a child. For six decades she has prayed to God for rescue from this hell and she says she has heard nothing from God.

From the year 2000 to the year 2006 I had a terrible case of Lyme disease. I took nearly every antibiotic known for it. In those days I was pastoring a church in Southern Oregon and in that church, like this one, we had a tradition in which the Sunday closest to epiphany we gave out little colored stars with a special word on it and invited the members and friends of the church to take that word home and let it inform their whole year. Remember yours for 2019?

There are over 50 different words we pass out to people every epiphany. Well, back when I was the sickest, two years in a row, I got the same star. *Patience. Patience.* Boy did that gall me. But, looking back, it was just the word I needed to hear.

Stanley Hauerwas says that Israel's journey of faith, their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, was "long training in *not* being in control."

That was the sermon topic last week. The first line from the Pilgrim's Credo is: "I am not in control." Well, the second line, "I am not in a hurry," may be a fine-tuning of the first.

Not being in a hurry because you've learned you're not in control is not a bad definition of the training required for a faithful Christian life. It's about learning patience -- accepting that we must be vulnerable to the tardy ways, and complex purposes of a living God.

Here's something I love. It's a Nigerian saying. "The times are urgent. We need to slow down."

Think about that for a moment. I think it might mean (among other things) that we need to be present where we are. We tend to panic instead of thinking reasonably about things.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God."

Karen Swallow Prior, a college professor, says that the question she is asked most by college students is, "What advice do you have for me?"

Her answer? "Hang in there. Be patient. Life is long."

I love that. I think it's excellent advice for young people. Young people should be patient about marriage. Every statistic tells us, the best predictor of divorce is marrying too young.

Young people need to be gentle with themselves about finding their way in the world. It's likely that they will enter a profession and do something for five years, and another for fifteen, and yet another thing after that because "way leads on to way," as Robert Frost says. They may need to go to school between different careers. It's how we roll these days. It takes patience.

You know, there were four hundred years between God's last words of the Old Testament and God's first words in the New.

The word, grace, means gift. Grace is not grace if it's predictable, programmable, on demand. Maybe that's why God sometimes takes God's own good time to show up, to reach out, to move, to act.

Christians in the Greek town of Thessalonica asked Paul, "When is Jesus returning? We're worn out with waiting."

Here's how the Apostle Paul responded: "With the eternal God, a thousand years are like one day."

Nice try, Paul.

In Matthew chapter 11 Jesus says my favorite words of his ...."Come to me, all you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest."

But, you know, few of us want to rest. We're programmed to do something, to act.

As most of you know, I was on sabbatical this last summer and the first morning of it I got up early and started writing. First thing. And I wrote for hours every day.

That's just me. I am programmed to produce. My greatest fear is wasting time. But sometimes we need to slow down. I bet you already know that.

I want to close with an important lesson on that from Jessica Kautz of Missoula, Montana. It involves a stray cat. Here are her own words ...

***SHE CAME INTO OUR LIVES*** on a smoky summer day. The wildfires had been raging around our valley for so long, we'd become accustomed to a hazy yellow world. Residents were advised not to spend too much time outside, but one evening my boyfriend and I decided to risk it and walk downtown for dinner.

*On the way back we were in a jovial mood, our bellies full of wine. We were approaching the train tracks when we found her, all alone, looking too skinny, her tortoiseshell fur unkempt. We crouched on the sidewalk, and she came over, rubbed against our legs, and purred.*

*Rescue cats are my weakness; my house was already full of them. My head urged me to keep walking, but my heart told me we couldn't leave her. We brought her to my boyfriend's apartment to figure out our next move. She immediately settled in as if she'd always lived there, not hiding or making any attempt to get out.*

*Neither of us wanted the upheaval of a new pet. Plus my boyfriend was an avowed dog person. He agreed that she could stay temporarily. If we couldn't find her owner in a day or two, we'd take her to the shelter. We did everything you're supposed to do: We called animal control and the Humane Society. We checked the missing-pet notices online. We took her to the vet to see if she was chipped. No leads. In the meantime she was the perfect houseguest. She didn't scratch the furniture. She faithfully used the litter box. She ate any food we set out. She followed us around but didn't make a pest of herself.*

*My boyfriend tried to play it cool, but I could tell she was winning him over. She raced to the door when he came home, and at night she curled up on his chest. When he'd had enough, he would say, "OK, kitty," and she would agreeably jump into the nest he'd made for her beside his bed.*

*One day he told me that she'd helped him accomplish his goal of sitting down each evening and relaxing for twenty minutes. He'd found it impossible to do this on his own, but now she'd leap into his lap, settle in, and force him to sit there and do nothing. It was the meditative pause he'd badly needed.*

*He stopped scanning the missing-pet notices. She was already home.*

*"The times are urgent. We need to slow down."*

Amen