



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Wait For It” **Sermon on Romans 8:22-27**

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Day of Pentecost
May 23, 2021

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

We have all been living in waiting rooms. Waiting for the pandemic to end. Waiting to see grandchildren, and their parents. Waiting to get back to the arena. “Go Preds!” Waiting to get on the flight to Europe. Waiting for a waiter. “Help is so hard to find these days.”

During the last few months, I've had to field a lot of waiting room questions. When can we get back to church? When will the signups disappear? When can we get rid of the masks?

I was at a restaurant on Friday and happened to see a parishioner come in. I tracked him down and said, "Great to see you. You know you can come back to worship now." He said, "Not yet. I don't do abbreviated worship." "Abbreviated worship?" My first thought was that there is finally someone who wants a longer sermon! But that's not what he wanted. What he wanted, what he's waiting for, is for the choir to process. Taking up the offering. Passing the Communion plates. The choir recessing. He's waiting on the way it was. I suspect the day is coming soon, but he'll have to wait.

Waiting rooms. Where is yours?

I know someone who is waiting on a few more treatments, and then waiting on the results.

I know someone who is waiting on employment.

I know someone who is waiting to have a baby.

I have been waiting on a call to hear of my mom's death. I know it's coming, but this past week my sister sent my brother and me a text that Mom had been kicked out of hospice. For those of you keeping track at home, that's twice now. My sister calls her "The Comeback Kid". But mom has long signaled she doesn't know how to die, requesting Elijah's fiery chariot to just come and pick her up.

Waiting rooms are the most faith-filled places on earth. Think about that. They are filled with folks who do not have. And yet they have. The "already" and the "not yet." Do you know what I mean? Do I need to explain everything to you people?

When you go to the doctor's office and sit in the waiting room, you don't go there thinking that your name will never be called. That would be ridiculous. You have hope, even though "hope" is hardly the word. You're beyond hope. It's a faith, even though "faith" is hardly the word. It is almost as if you "know" that your name will be called. Like it's guaranteed. It's not guaranteed!

If you want to meet the faithful, head into the waiting room. Testaments of faith. There, they are believing that they will see a doctor, or that the plane will land, or that "this too shall pass," or that "She'll be home any minute. I just know it." There are lots of people who have what they don't have.

I know when it comes to God, there are some who say, "I have it! I have it. I have God. I have Jesus." And, on the big stage with the big music and all the spotlights, they unveil the smallest little god and say, "This can be yours, too."

The Apostle Paul isn't talking about the small "What will Jesus do for me?" The Apostle Paul knows God is up to something big, something huge. Paul writes: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now!" The whole creation. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus isn't just for me or you. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is leaving nothing out. The ages have shifted, and the great reconciliation of all things has begun. Has begun. But Paul knows it's not completed yet. "We wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." "We hope for what we do not see; we wait for it with patience."

The Apostle Paul says the waiting room is where we need to be. Because even though Christ lived, Christ was crucified, Christ died, Christ was raised from the dead - we know we have - but we don't know what we don't have.

You can ask Howard, and he'll show you the hole in his life that is the size and shape of his wife who died.

You can ask Corinne, who fights and fights and fights to live, and she'll tell you how painful the cancer is.

You can ask Myrna, Mark, Baker or Rees, and you'll see with each new tumor that forms, the heart constricts a little more.

You can ask Jody, who is trying to find a path forward.
Ask James, who needs some answers, for all he has is questions.
Ask Rebecca, who is swimming upstream all the time.
Ask Ann, who wants some justice.
Ask Phil, who prays and prays and prays.

Paul says life in the waiting room is filled with groans. All of creation is groaning. Prayers go up as groans. The Holy Spirit is groaning, too. The Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The faithful gather in the waiting room. Look around. Just ask. What are you in here for? A broken heart? A grandchild in need? Someone to love you? Someone to see you? Paul says we have what we don't have.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God. Our names will be called. Until then, in the waiting room, we behave like Christ.

I remember my friend, Linda. She died of breast cancer a number of years ago now. I remember when she died. I was in bed asleep, and woke up with a start because something had brushed me across my face. Heart racing, I looked at the clock; 3:17 a.m. I settled my heart down and went back to bed, not knowing. In the morning, I got a call from David, her husband. He said, "Linda died early this morning." "What time?" He said, "3:17 a.m." I just knew that Linda would do something like that.

I remember when she went in for her first round of chemo. Sitting in the waiting room at Duke clinic, in a room full of strangers, I suspect she was scared. I'd be. But she went over to a woman who was alone, and in the next moment, the woman was crying, and Linda was holding her. That's the way she was - in the waiting room - lifting people up in a hug that was shaped like a prayer that said, "All things work together for good for those who love God."

In the waiting room, there comes a smile for a garbage truck. Who in here smiles at seeing garbage truck? I've never done it before, but then I didn't know a story about Imogene Maddox. Did you know Imogene? If you met her, you'd never forget her. Her granddaughter told a story of going to visit her when she was young, and how they made sandwiches, put together chips, and fixed some colas, all to the sound of an approaching garbage truck. They stood at the curb and set up a banquet for sanitation workers. That's the way it was for Imogene. If you were going to touch her life, she was going to touch yours back, and with a party.

The mailman got a party. The woman who took temperatures at the fitness center got a party. The doorman got a party. And so, in the world of a garbage can, her granddaughter said, "We stood outside on the road to say, 'I know you're alive and you need to eat, and I'm glad you're in my life.'" And I know where this all is heading - all things work together for good for those who love God.

In the waiting room, I think about Rita, tracing the little feet of her students on construction paper. Cutting out the little feet, and tacking them to the wall. But some of the cutouts made their way into her purse, and then to the shoe store. She would push them into new shoes to find a pair that would fit, then purchase them for her students who didn't have decent shoes. You can hear the groaning. How our lives are prayers. How all things work together for good.

There's Leo, loading up another 18-wheeler with lumber to send into the town hit by the hurricane.

Look around the waiting room, and you can see how the Spirit is taking our lives and shaping them in such a way that they look ... now wait for it ... they look ... wait for it ... like that of a savior.