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Patience – Luke 12: 35-40

Yogi Berra had a way with words. One of his classic sayings: “If the world was perfect, it wouldn’t be.” Yes, of course. If the world were perfect, and still had people in it, it wouldn’t be perfect. No kidding. People tend to make a mess of things. Proof of that is the existence of waiting rooms.

Jesus’ illustration about servants waiting for their master to come home made me think of waiting rooms. In a perfect world, there would be no waiting rooms. Can I get an “amen” to that? They do serve an important purpose: a place to wait when waiting is necessary. But there is something good to be found in them: they teach patience. Patience is both an art, and, for the faithful, a spiritual quality, one of the great blessings of the Holy Spirit. Patience grows with practice – and obedience.

How many of you enjoy spending time in waiting rooms? How many feel like you’re spending more and more time in them these days?

There's a routine to waiting rooms. Get there before your appointment, check in, fill out the paperwork – and sit, maybe read the book you brought, check your phone, or if you're really lucky, look at a beat-up magazine about celebrities.

Perhaps you'll be treated to watching others who came after you go in ahead of you. Sometimes, you may finally be in the middle of something interesting when you're called.

A waiting room session can be filled with drama, if you want to look at it that way! But waiting rooms are also opportunities to grow in patience.

Many times people look at Jesus' words in this passage and think he's saying that we should always be on our toes, ready to jump at any second, on high alert all the time.

Have you ever tried to do that? Wasn't easy, was it? And it sure wears you out. Waiting with that kind of intensity just doesn't work very well. Worse, anything that comes along becomes a distraction, an interruption. Your focus is broken, or you brush off whatever's come up. When you are so laser-focused on a task, patience doesn't even apply: anxiety is perhaps a better description.

Jesus isn't saying that the servants are staring at the door, on their tiptoes; no, he tells us, be ready. Be ready. And being ready is more than zeroing in on the one thing you're waiting for: it means that you're

preparations are done, your homework's ready to hand in, so to speak. That sort of readiness is patient. It's based in faith in God's promises. It can see those interruptions, distractions, for what they really are. Sometimes, *they* are the breath of God.

That interruption may be precisely what we're waiting for – we just don't recognize it for what it is because we're focused on what we *do* expect. God breaks in on God's terms, God's time, not ours. I've known many a parent who's been frantically looking for their child, only to find that the child has been with them the whole time. They've been looking so hard, they missed what was right there.

So, a part of our waiting for the master to arrive is openness to being surprised: ready to respond, everything in order, but not on edge. This is patience born of *faith in practice*.

My Mom turned one hundred years old yesterday. She lives with my brother, in the house she and my late father bought nearly thirty years ago. My sister and her husband are there with her, my family joined her by video to sing her Happy Birthday – she's doing well, and had a good day.

But as the last living member of her generation in our family, she's wondered aloud to me from time to time what she's supposed to be doing. Or, more accurately, what she's still doing here. She once said that she sometimes feels like she's in a waiting room. My Mom is

devout, and over the past few years, spent most of her time reading, much of that from devotional books and her Bible. Her remote control, phone, and candy are on one side of her chair; her books on the other. I call that house the “Momastery” – a sort of monastery – because of her patient, constant faith, and all the prayer that goes on there. And she’s growing in the blessing of patience by practicing it: she taught Sunday School for so many years; now her primary student is herself.

She has no – or very few – things clamoring for her attention. She doesn’t have a schedule to keep, no people waiting on her to finish something for them. Her purpose is to wait on God, and in the meantime be attentive to what God is doing around her. And, she’s ready. But what strikes me is her patience: she goes about the round of her day, beginning with putting God in her mind the moment she wakes up, and then waits, patiently, for the Lord.

So in the midst of the hustle and bustle, in the middle of boredom and routine, we’re called to be ready. To have what we need laid out, ready to hand; to remind ourselves throughout the day that we are God’s and God will one day bring us to him.

Then there’s patience that grows from obedience. Carla, the wonderful lady who does our bulletin, sometimes finds some pretty interesting pictures for the cover. Suggestions, you might say. Given my sermon title “Patience,” her first offering was a dog with a treat

sitting on the bridge of his muzzle, its eyes imploring its owner to let him have his biscuit! Off to the side were the words, “I’m being patient, ok? Hurry up!”

That’s another kind of patience, patience linked to obedience. People do train their dogs this sort of thing to instill obedience: the dog can’t have that biscuit until they’re told. On the other hand, they *do* know they’ll get it if they wait!

We know this kind of patience, too – patience built on obedience. You don’t eat your dessert until you’ve finished all your dinner. You wait your turn. You do what you’re supposed to do, because that’s the way you were taught.

And the reward is the one that you’ve learned to expect: a shot at that dog biscuit, dessert. Still, if you’ve ever trained a dog, you also know how enthusiastically that treat is received. And we all have, at some time, known the satisfaction that goes with getting things done, the reward.

Jesus also talks about reward here. The key, though is that what Jesus proposes is something far beyond what we have been trained to expect.

Back to his story. Here, we are clearly the servants, and the master of the house is God. But for those of you who watched *Downton Abbey* or *Upstairs, Downstairs* or *The Remains of the Day*, you know very well

that the servants don't get special treatment from the master just for doing their jobs – they *may* get acknowledgement of their presence, or perhaps a word.

Yet what does the master do here? Oh, my goodness: even though he's just come from a party, even though it's terribly late and he should be tired and want only to go to bed, he changes out of his party outfit and into serving clothes, has his servants sit down at his own table, and serves them as honored guests. Say what?

Look, the servants did wait up to open the house for him when he returned from the party. That's their job. And it's probably also part of their job to stay out of his way, since he has come from a party and is probably tired and tipsy. Get him in, get his needs met, get the house closed up, get to bed yourself.

Jesus' master of the house has them sit down at his own table, and waits on them as if they were guests. That's way more than we expect.

Jesus says that if we are patient, if we wait as we should, if he finds us ready for his coming and ready to come to him, he will put us at his own table and serve us as his guests. He says, just before this scripture, "Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father delights in giving you the kingdom."

This sacrament is a taste of this: here we are, gathered at his table; here he waits on us; here, in the Lord's Supper, he is the host, we are the

guests, and we can find, if we're not too tired of waiting, a glimpse of what Christ promises us: the Kingdom itself.

It's not easy being patient in an impatient world, a world filled with schedules, worry and anxiety. But it is a faithful discipline, and it will be rewarded. As Jesus says: "Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father delights in giving you the kingdom."