Book 7 Sunday April 16, 1978

"SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO WAIT!" Acts 1:4-11
No. 1 in a series: "What happened/happens after Easter"

A few weeks ago in the Tuesday morning Bible class, one of the members of the class said, "We usually hear a lot about Christmas and the birth of Christ, then we hear about his life and teachings, followed by his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, his subsequent arrest, trial, crucifixion, death and resurrection--but what happened after that?

So today in answer to that good question, I am beginning a series of three sermons on the theme--"What happened, happens, after Easter?"

The story of what happened after that first Easter some 2000 years ago is mostly to be found in the book of Acts in the New Testament. Of course the story of what happened after Easter is still going on all around the world.

To begin, let's look at what happened after the first Easter and then later we'll be seeing what still happens. After the experience of the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning, the close followers of Jesus were excited, yet confused. They didn't know what to make of it or what to do about it. They hadn't expected it. What do you do when something unexpected happens? It takes a while to get used to it.

Then to further confuse the disciples during the first several weeks following the resurrection, Jesus would appear to them and then disappear. He was with them, yet not with them. What was going to happen next, no one knew. Jesus had not given them any plan of organization. There had been no short or long range planning. No committee or group had met to draw up goals and objectives. No market analysis had been done to determine if the good news of the resurrection had a market in that world.

The disciples weren't even sure that they were supposed to tell anyone what had happened. Some of them thought they should return to their fishing business. So the first several weeks after the ressurrection were a time of confusion. There were no definitive answers.

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts in the New Testament sums up this period of time after Easter in one sentence:

"To them, that is to the disciples, Jesus presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking of the Kingdom of God."

The disciples had had a unique experience, but weren't sure what to do with it or what it really meant. And that brings us to the first main point of this sermon.

During this forty day period after the resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples only one instruction--"Wait!" Jesus said to them, "Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father." He was saying--"If you wait [redacted] with patience, then after a brief time it will all begin to fall into place and begin to make sense and you will know what to do."

That was good advice, not only to the disciples then, but to us now. "Sometimes we have to wait." When an overwhelming experience or surprising change comes into our lives and we aren't sure what it means, then wait! Don't act on it too soon. There are times for all of us when we are too much in a hurry and then we do things while we are still confused, or before we have any sense of direction.

Yet all of us know there are times when the most difficult thing in the world is to do nothing, to wait. But there are times when that is the best thing to do.

Now just to wait when there is nothing we know of to wait for, is something quite different from what we are talking about here. The disciples were told to wait for the promise of the Father." They were to wait for God's power to come into their lives in a new way. God's way is not always our way and God's pace is not ours.

In a little article entitled, "The Art of Doing Nothing," Halford Luccock underscores the importance of waiting, of at times doing nothing. "It's a real art," he said. "Many people are doing nothing when they are merely doing something trivial, such as fiddling at something, or dawdling, or playing solitaire, or worrying about the work they should be doing. Thus they miss it on both ends. They do not accomplish anything and they do not enter the wonderful state of pure vacancy."

"One prerequisite for the true enjoyment of doing nothing is that you must have plenty to do. Obviously if you have

nothing to do, there is no fun at all in doing nothing. The same is true of waiting. If you have nothing to wait for, then there's no fun or anticipation or reason for waiting. It's just boredom."

Jesus told the disciples to do nothing, to wait, because he knew that in a short while there would be plenty to do. What his followers needed first, however, was to settle down, get things in proper perspective, and wait for the promse of God's power, God's Spirit to enter their lives. He didn't want them to be rushing off in all directions. Sometimes we have to wait.

Obviously, not all waiting is good. Some people try to escape life by waiting and never doing anything. They have no energy because they dare not face life. Some people dread making decisions and put off action as long as possible because they are always afraid. Some have their security in things as they are and would wait forever before attempting anything new. Waiting may also be the result of laziness or indifference. But this is not the kind of waiting Jesus was talking about.

Real waiting is concerned waiting. It is feeling and knowing oneself involved in the outcome. It is being personally invested in the result. Real waiting is trust in God. It is our rest amid the unrest and confusion of the workaday world. Sometimes we have to wait.

But sometimes we find it so difficult to wait and that was also the problem of the disciples. Even though Jesus told them to wait, they wanted answers. They wanted to know the future! So the asked with impatience, "Lord will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"

Even after the resurrection, the disciples still misunderstood the nature of God's kingdom. They could see it only in terms of Israel being a restored earthly kingdom with Jesus as a kind of second King David.

So in addition to telling them to wait for the promise of the Father, Jesus had to give the disciples a second instruction--he said, "It is not for you to know the times or seasons which God has fixed by his own authority." And then he went on to say, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my

witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus didn't answer their question. He corrected the question and then gave a totally new answer. Jesus shifted the emphasis from speculation about the future to demonstration in the present. He told them God's kingdom was going to be all over the world and not just confined to what they knew as Israel, and that they were going to be instrumental in spreading that kingdom.

We still have the same problem as those original disciples. The desire to not wait and at the same time to know the future is always with us. There have been elements within the Christian Church through the years which do not pay much attention to the answer Jesus gave to his disciples--"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which God has fixed by his own authority."

There are always those among us who not only ask what the disciples asked after Easter, but who claim also to know exactly the answer. They believe they can predict the future in extra-ordinary detail.

Recently I came across this prediction in regard to Israel and its relation to the end of time.

"Israel will find itself surrounded by four confederations of unfriendly superpowers. To the north will be Russia, to the south Egypt, to the east China and to the west the Common Market Countries. A world dictator will rise from the European confederation, which these Bible students call the anti-Christ. Under his reign, the world will enjoy a period of peace and economic prosperity and religion will thrive in one ecumenical body."

"For its protection, Israel will make a covenant with this dictator and will be permitted to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Israel will also prosper economically and will expand its borders into Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile Russia will desire the land Israel occupies and will manipulate Egypt into invading Israel, starting World War III. Russia will then join Egypt in war against Israel, and the Common Market Nations will use the war as an excuse to invade Israel. Russia eventually will be annihilated. The European dictator will set up rule in Jerusalem and from there invade Egypt. While in Egypt, the European invaders

will hear of an impending invasion of Israel by China and other eastern nations. The nations will gather in the valley of Meggido, between the port of Haifa and the Sea of Galilee, for the Battle of Armaggedon."

In answer to such predictions and thousands of others like them, the words of Jesus to his disciples after Easter need to be heard again--"It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority."

Instead, Jesus said to his disciples and he says to us--"Be my witnesses, here and now and the future will take care of itself. Begin now. Let the world see a demonstration of what the power of God can do when it works through the fellowship of those who trust in him." Jesus shifted the emphasis from worrying about the future to the transformation of the present. And that's what we need to do.

The next thing that happened after Easter was the final disappearance of Jesus from the disciples. During the first several weeks after the resurrection, Jesus would appear and then disappear and then appear again. At times his followers could see him, touch him and talk with him in a personal way. But then came his final disappearance.

While he was present among them for the 40 days following Easter, the discipled tended to focus too much on his presence and couldn't see much beyond that. They were to discover that he had to be absent from them totally before he could be present to them in a new way.

Thus it was that after his final disappearance, so to speak, his influence among them was stronger than ever. His presence was more vividly felt than before. And his power continued to make itself known through the fellowship of those who had been and were to become his followers.

Furthermore up to the time of his final disappearance, Jesus had been pretty much of a local event, confined in space and time to the area around Jerusalem and what was then known as Palestine. Now after the resurrection and after his final disappearnce, Jesus Christ began to become universal.

It was only then that his followers began to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to

ends of the earth." What began as a seemingly local event was now to become world-wide. It was only when Jesus was gone from his followers in a physical sense that they began to get to work and also began to remember more than ever many of the things he had done and said. One of the mysteries of life is that memory can often bring us closer to each other than physical presence. Physical presence not only invites communication, but also can block intimate communication.

Sometimes we are able to write things to a person in a letter that we are not able to say to them in person. Although feeling and touching are important to us as human beings, they do not always create the closeness we seek. The more experience in living we have, the more we sense that closeness grows in continuous interplay between presence and absence.

In absence; from a distance; in memory; we often see someone in a new way. We are less distracted by each other's idiosyncracies and are better able to see and understand the whole person and the inner core. Of course memory can also distort, falsify and cause selective perception. But that is only one aspect of memory. Memory and absence can also clarify, purify and bring into focus. It can give us perspective. Sometimes it is only when we get away from something that we begin to see it clearly.

That is precisely what the early followers of Jesus discovered after the resurrection and after Jesus' final disappearance. At one point before the crucifixion, Jesus had told them, "It is to your advantage that I go away." Now the disciples began to understand what he meant.

What happened after Easter. We discover that sometimes we have to wait. We discover that we cannot very accurately predict the future or have all the answers. WE cannot always know the times and seasons which God has fixed by his own authority. And sometimes someone has to go away before we really get down to work.

Next week, we're going to see just what the followers of Jesus began to do after his final disappearance.