

“Worth the Wait”
The Seventh Sunday of Easter (B)
Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

Tom Mangelsen waits for a living. To be fair, that’s not his customary job description. Officially, he’s a wildlife photographer. For 50 years he has captured some of the exquisite moments of nature on film: a cheetah lounging in a tree; a herd of caribou crossing midstream; grizzly bears extending their jaws to catch the salmon swimming upstream. He is to photography what Jane Goodall is to chimpanzees. Despite his renown, Mangelsen has yet to perfect the art of deciding when and how these Kodak-worthy moments will occur. So, Tom Mangelsen has learned to wait.

He is the first to admit that he doesn’t exhibit the same kind of patience with people that he does with the wild. What makes his waiting in the wild much more potent and enduring is his willingness to pay attention to every drop of water, every gust of wind, every footprint in the mud, and to live with heart and eyes open to what *could* be just as much as they are open to what is. Above all, he trusts. He trusts that something is already happening somewhere, and this something that is happening will enter his line of sight in a matter of time—perhaps in 5 minutes, perhaps in 5 hours. As he told *60 Minutes’* Anderson Cooper last week, “You wait long enough...it pays off.”¹

Waiting that pays off is exactly what 120 men and women in an otherwise forgettable house in Jerusalem are doing. There is nothing as glorious about this room as the wild outdoors, but anticipation and possibility still hang in the air like humidity on an August morning. And they want to be ready. Days earlier, Jesus was taken up to heaven in a rapturous display of glory. Before he left, Jesus told his disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait for him to return—not as they had known him on earth, but as all of creation *would* come to know as the Holy Spirit. He did not tell them though what this Spirit would look or feel like or when this would be. Luke’s telling of it in this morning’s reading from Acts makes everything so cut and dry. Don’t be fooled though. Waiting was hard. There were decisions to make, exhaustion to fight through, and attitudes to deal with. Never mind that they had already been on an emotional roller coaster for weeks. So, this morning, these 100+ women and men have a choice. They can give up on this following Jesus business and seek something more familiar and predictable and something they can control. Or,

¹ Thomas D. Mangelsen, interview with Anderson Cooper, “Into the Wild with Thomas D. Mangelsen,” *60 Minutes*, May 6, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/into-the-wild-with-thomas-mangelsen/>.

they can immerse themselves in the life that has given them strength, the life that has told them who they are, the life that has given them a purpose, a life they can't predict.

[PAUSE] They choose the latter, and because of them our lives as Christians exist today. Their waiting was an active kind of waiting full of anticipation in what was to come and rooted in their memories of God's faithfulness, memories fed by prayer and Scripture, and fellowship over bread and wine. It was as though they had one foot in the here and now and one foot ready for the future. They could neither see nor name what would be, but they lived trusting that a new chapter was dawning, and they were going to be ready for it. The question today is, will you be ready or have you written off the work of God as a miracle reserved only for the righteous few? Are you rooted in how you think things should be or in the truth that God is perfecting us and this world by God's grace and love each day?

To be a follower of Jesus is to live waiting—not the passive waiting we feel while we wait for the doctor to call our name or for us to inch our way through traffic. We are called to the waiting that comes from knowing something is about to happen, that something is happening. It just happens to be outside of our realm of conscious or view. For us that happening is the completion of God's reign over all creation and our perfection and wholeness. We wait actively pursuing the justice and wellbeing of others because God has won the victory over evil and death, and our deepest secret and heaviest failure are not the final answer, love is. And there is plenty enough of it to give away. At every step of the way, God has not forgotten us and God will not stop now. Each day is one more day to live into the truth of God's love and promise that has been made known to us in Scripture and in Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead. Stay rooted in prayer and this community. Lean on others as so many did those initial weeks and years of the church. Be alert. Anticipate. Trust not in your version of a good life, but God's promise of a whole and meaningful life.

Today, we mark the last Sunday of Easter and prepare for a season of ministry. Yet, for some, this Easter season has felt less like a season of new life and more like death—if not of your body, of your soul, your future, your work, and maybe even your sense God's love and faithfulness to never leave nor forsake you. You may be certain that nothing more is in store for you but the same 'ole, same 'ole. Maybe you need you to remember the story of Mary and Peter and Andrew and Matthias—people who had every reason to give up—their Lord was gone—but they didn't. They lived expectantly and their waiting was our door to new life.

On the last night of my family's safari in South Africa several years ago, our tracker Colbert spotted a chameleon in a tree. Except for the stars in the sky, it was otherwise a near pitch-black summer night. "How did you see that?" we all wondered. Colbert explained to us that he had immersed himself in the sights and sounds of the wild for years. As he said, "I've been down these paths many times. It's home to me. Just because it's dark that doesn't mean that the animals stop living I know what to look and listen for. I am always ready for them."

I'm hear to tell you this morning that Jesus has been down the paths of joy and sorrow, life and death before, and he's got the victory secured. Although your life may be dark that doesn't mean the Spirit has stopped transforming you into God's likeness. Always be ready for it.

Before Anderson Cooper wrapped up his interview with Tom Mangelsen, he asked him: "have you learned anything in all that waiting?" Without missing a beat, Mangelsen's eyes lit up and he smiled, "It's worth it."²

Don't ever think the same isn't true for you.

The Rev. Dr. Maria A. Kane
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Waldorf, MD
May 13, 2018

Examples of Tom Mangelsen's work are on the next page.

² Ibid.

