

Pause: Learning To Wait on God

Peter

Good morning again Colonies family! Over the last week our local school systems finished up the year which likely comes as a relief to you if you are a teacher or have children in schools. The adjustment to online school was not easy for anyone. Perhaps, you have seen and can relate to the picture of one set of parents with the message on the side of their vehicle, "You lied. My kids are not a joy to have in class!"

We thank you, teachers, for your investment in our children. And to our families with graduating seniors, I know that there have been moments in the past eighteen years when you wondered if your child would live long enough to see this day. We rejoice with you and continue to pray for the faith and development of you, graduates. One day you will have quite the story to tell your children and grandchildren.

This is one of those moments in history that will always be remembered. But how will you remember these days? Events that are outside our control are bound to happen. And we have a choice in the narrative we tell ourselves after the event. We can tell stories of fear, despair, and hopelessness or we can pause, listen to the voice of God at this moment.

Last Sunday Alli and I celebrated our 17th wedding anniversary. That evening she pulled out the video from that day to watch with our girls. I grew uneasy watching an awkward and insecure version of myself from seventeen years ago. Of course I am still awkward and insecure, but I would like to think a little less so. To be fair to myself, what else could I have been at twenty-two. With so little experience of life any confidence I had came from ignorance and could be shaken easily.

Did you know that most scholars think the disciples were no older than I was in that wedding video when Jesus was crucified? We imagine them to be mature in age and faith, but that likely wasn't the case. They were young, full of energy, competitive (think James and John asking for seats by Jesus or Peter and John racing to the empty tomb), and in the beginning stages of developing their identity and purpose.

With that in mind they endured quite the rollercoaster ride the final week of Jesus' life. They enter Jerusalem as royalty. Crowds of people in full celebration, offering the red carpet treatment. Yes, it was primarily directed at Jesus, but the disciples were recipients of it as well. Each act raising the expectations of a new kingdom. The time was finally nearing and they were likely finding it difficult to sleep because of the excitement.

Then, came what we call the Last Supper. Jesus accusing one of them of being a traitor. Over the last few years these young men had bonded and built trust. No-one turned and looked over at Judas. They could not imagine one of their own brothers doing what Jesus described. Their hearts would be broken in a few short hours when Judas comes up to kiss Jesus on the cheek as a mob out for blood stands at the ready.

Without time to process the betrayal they now fight for their lives. First, Peter grabbing a sword ready to take them all on by himself. Then, after Jesus surrenders, the young men scatter. The only thing that matters now is survival. The drive to survive pushed Peter to lie about his association with Jesus. They must have been shaken by how quickly it all escalated. Within twenty-four hours their friend and mentor would be executed.

Don't think that the resurrection fixed all of this for these young men. Remember they didn't understand it. Every time Jesus appeared to them they were frightened. Any confidence or certainty they may have had about their purpose in this world had been crushed.

Jesus takes the time to rebuild them. Maybe it is because his failure was so great that we are given more details about Peter's restoration than the others. It begins with another fishing trip.

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. (John 21:1-5, NIV)

Now, about three years ago Peter and Jesus have a similar conversation about not catching any fish. And like last time Jesus suggests trying the other side of the boat and when they do so the nets begin to break because of the number of fish. The similarities lead to the conclusion this is Jesus.

While cleaning up after breakfast Jesus turns to Peter, *"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." (John 21:15, NIV)*

Just as Peter denied knowing Jesus three times Jesus asks the question, "Do you love me?" three times. After each affirmative reply Jesus gives Peter his purpose. Feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep.

Peter is given the gift of clarity. He knows what he is to do every day. Notice, Jesus says, "my lambs" and "my sheep." Not just the ones Peter chooses. This will be his mission until he is old and *"[he] will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." (John 21:18, NIV)*

Most lessons I have heard or taught from this story stop at this point. Today, I think it is necessary to continue reading verses twenty and twenty-one.

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" (John 21:20-21, NIV)

When told exactly what his purpose was Peter fell into the trap of comparison. What an easy trap it is to fall into. What others are doing or not doing is so easy to notice and such a distraction from fulfilling our purpose.

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." (John 21:22, NIV)

Jesus quickly corrects Peter's focus because **comparison produces inactivity.**

Without live sports to watch I have been watching with the ESPN documentary on Michael Jordan and his *Last Dance* with the Chicago Bulls in 1999. One of the stories told was from 1994 the year Michael Jordan retired to pursue a baseball career. Even without Jordan the

team made it to the Eastern Conference Finals against the New York Knicks. Down 2-0, the game was tied with 1.8 seconds remaining.

Coach Phil Jackson designed a play for Toni Kukoc, with Scottie Pippen to inbound the ball. Upset he would not be given the opportunity to take the last shot, Pippen refused to enter the game. For years, Pippen was saddled with the unfortunate nickname “Sitting Bull.”

When we made the transition to provide resources and content online I was forced to confront some longstanding insecurities. My ego leads me to compare the size of churches and conference speaking opportunities with others I know. I made the decision several years ago that it would be safer for me not to use social media or other online platforms.

After confessing my anxieties about increasing my involvement online to some friends, they brought me back to my own calling and purpose. I realized that I was content to sit on the sidelines because of my ego and insecurities compounded by the trap of comparison. For years I had passed on the opportunity of obedience.

In my house, there is a lot of “what about them” going on. As I think back to the times I am waiting on God, even during these days, I am tempted to look around and say “What about them? Why are they getting to do that, and I don’t? Why are they not doing that, and I have to? Every time it is stated, anger and inactivity replace obedience and faithfulness.

Jesus told Peter, “What does he have to do with you? You have your mission. Follow me.”

So, what can we do to avoid the trap of comparison? How can we remember these days with gratitude?

Years later, an older, wiser Peter would write to a church waiting for God to deliver them from crisis,

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11, NIV)

Peter is calling the Christians to the same level of obedience Jesus called him to. Obedience does not become distracted by others’ actions. Eugene Peterson writes about a *long obedience in the same direction*. For Peter, that long obedience is not characterized by completion but by love. “Love each other deeply,” he says.

In the context of our discussion of comparison I would say it this way, **celebrate what God has given others**. We talk about being grateful for what we have, but by itself the practice can continue a self-centered life. Your life purpose is beyond yourself.

Every good and perfect gift is from above... (James 1:17, NIV).

Even if what is good has not come to me. I am trying to develop the habit of rejoicing with others. When I start to get jealous of others, I want to praise God for his generosity. When I am tempted to look over my shoulder and say “what about them,” I want to help them see God’s blessings in their life.

This shift helps me to avoid the temptation to compare and become inactive. Instead of sitting and pouting, I am able to **leverage what God has given me.**

To convince the people of Philadelphia of the advantage of street lighting, Benjamin Franklin decided to show his neighbors by placing one in front of his house. He purchased an attractive lantern, polished the glass, and placed it on an extended pole in front of his house. Each evening, he would light the wick and hang out the lantern. Before long all of his neighbors noticed the light and even those far up the street noticed the warm glow around his house. The people passing by his house were delighted because it made walking in the dark so much easier. Soon, others placed lanterns in front of their homes and eventually the city recognized the need for having well-lighted streets.

What if you chose to live that way? There is no win in comparison. There is a win that comes from devotion to one’s purpose. What if we stopped the complaining and comparison with others and just let our lights shine.

Each week in this study, I have wanted to guide you in learning from someone waiting on God, but also to lead you to Jesus. I want you to see that Jesus modeled living this way. People around him offered comparisons to John and the number of baptisms. But Jesus refused, speaking only of his time and doing the only the works his father had given him. He leveraged his life for you. I ask you to respond in kind.

If you would like to talk about what it means to follow Jesus you can let us know through these ways on the scree. If you are prepared for communion, I encourage you to do so now.