

Series: Words & Deeds Part 2: “Really! They Are Life Changing”
“Waiting For Jesus’ Return”
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 95:1-7a
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Being a follower of Jesus is not easy. Obedience is tough. My tendency to want what I want when I want it is strong. Oh, I look back over fifty-three years of loving God and others and see progress. I fall short of what God’s best is for me and my participation in God’s mission, and that’s okay. God continues to pick me up, love me, and show me the way. And in that process, I continue to grow to be more like Jesus. Karyn Wiseman writes, “God seeks to reconcile humanity in a divine/human relationship that results in salvation, redemption, safety, obedient discipleship, and divinely ordained leadership.”¹ As God redeems me, God uses me in the redemption of others. And the same is true for you. Being motivated by Jesus’ return is a spiritual discipline that encourages obedience. Through waiting for Jesus we serve.

Mary Thomas was a single mom of nine children living in Chicago’s rough West Side neighborhood. Seven of Mary’s nine kids were boys, young men constantly stretching the boundaries of their tired mother’s authority and patience. One day in 1966, Mary opened her front door to find 25 street thugs on her stoop. The men, members of the notorious Vice Lords gang, had come to recruit her seven sons. Mary, hearing their intentions, dropped her gaze, said “Oh, okay. Hold on just a second,” and closed the door. When the door opened again, the first thing the Vice Lords saw was the barrel of a loaded shotgun. “There’s only one gang around here, and that’s the Thomas gang.” With that same fortitude, Mary Thomas ushered each of her nine “gang members” to their high school graduation. You may have heard of her youngest son—pro basketball player and Hall of Famer Isaiah Thomas.²

¹Karyn L. Wiseman in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 319.

²As posted on preachingtoday.com, Judy Dutton, “Ten Badass Moms Who Deserve Their Own Holidays,” in *Mental Floss* (5-9-13).

Our task is to reorient the ways we deploy our resources. Waiting for Jesus' return is key to redistribution of resources. We do this through serving.

The lectionary readings in Psalm 95, Ephesians 1, and Matthew 25:31-46 confirm the point made in Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24: we are “keepers, searchers, and accountants”³ for the fallen to be found and to flourish. This is why waiting for Jesus' return is so important. Our waiting is active, because God uses us broken, repaired, and broken again people to make a difference for others. First, our praise and allegiance for all that life is and is to become is due to God. Our praise of God, in word and deed, should be a loud exclamation of joy. Second, our lives would do well to follow the life Jesus lived, one of birth, death, resurrection, and ascension. As we participate in Christ's journey, we are transformed and engage in the transformation of the world. We too are born, die, are reborn, and one day will live with our Creator forever. And third, whenever we serve the broken, least, lost, sick, hungry, homeless, oppressed, and imprisoned we serve Jesus.⁴

Rob Bell, the author of *Love Wins*, writes,

One night I was in elementary school, I said a prayer kneeling beside my bed in my room in the farmhouse we lived in on Dobie Road in Okemos, Michigan. With my parents on either side of me, I invited Jesus into my heart. I told God that I believed that I was a sinner and that Jesus came to save me and I wanted to be a Christian. I still remember that prayer. It did something to me. Something in me...I tell you that story because I believe that the indestructible love of God is an unfolding, dynamic reality and that every single one of us is endlessly invited to trust, accept, believe, embrace, and experience it.⁵

³These words were gleaned from Karyn L. Wiseman in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*, 319.

⁴In the paragraph of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Kenneth N. Ngwa, Wm. Marcus Small, Kimberly Bracken Long, Ruth Faith Santana-Grace, Lee Hull Moses, Laura Mariko Cheifetz, and Kate Ott in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 493-495, 495-497, 498-500, 501-503, 503-505, 506-508, and 508-510.

⁵Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 193-194.

Jesus is King and reigns over all. As we grow in our overall experience of Jesus being Lord, we will experience new habits and ways to live.

Jesus, the King of Kings, gives us freedom. Yet, there is responsibility in this freedom. Each of us must further develop as keepers, searchers, and accountants for the fallen to be found and to flourish. This is the common narrative of redemption/salvation in which God invites us to participate. We humans, the fallen, must be found to flourish. The found, then, live as keepers, searchers, and accountants for others who are fallen. And the cycle of falling and being found continues. That's the common narrative of redemption/salvation. That my friends is sanctification, becoming more like Jesus.

God is for humanity, not against it. Trust God that God's enduring relationship with humanity continuously defines and shapes God as a caring shepherd. Seek to bring justice into the world. Live in community with God, with one another, and with creation. Embrace endings becoming new beginnings. Let us, as Christians, share the good news with others. Praise be to Jesus Christ, the King of Kings. Amen.

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 26 November 2023
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