

TITLE: "Those Who Wait..."

TEXT: I Samuel 10:8 (OT p. 253), 13:2-14 (OT pp.255-256)

The prophet Samuel said to Saul: ⁸"And you shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me; then I will come down to you to present burnt offerings and offer sacrifices of well-being. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do."

²Saul chose three thousand out of Israel; two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin; the rest of the people he sent home to their tents. ³Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba; and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!" ⁴When all Israel heard that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines, the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.

⁵The Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, three thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude; they came up and encamped at Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. ⁶When the Israelites saw that they were in distress (for the troops were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns. ⁷Some Hebrews crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

⁸[Saul] waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people began to slip away from Saul. ⁹So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the offerings of well-being." And he offered the burnt offering.

¹⁰As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, Samuel arrived; and Saul went out to meet him and salute him. ¹¹Samuel said, "What have you done?"

Saul replied, "When I saw that the people were slipping away from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines were mustering at Michmash, ¹²I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down upon me at Gilgal, and I have not entreated the favor of the Lord'; so I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."

¹³Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, ¹⁴but now your kingdom will not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you."

Introduction – On the brink

In his book Dave Barry's Guide to Life, author Dave Barry gives a list of "Fears Your Mother Teaches You During Childhood." If were born prior to 1965, you're familiar with these. If you were born after 1965, you will find it hard to believe that people actually feared this stuff (p. 172, filed under "Emotions-Negative")

The fear that if you crossed your eyes, they'd get stuck that way.

The fear that if you go in the water less than an hour after eating, you will get a cramp and sink to the bottom and drown.

The fear that public toilet seats have germs capable of leaping 20 feet or more.

The fear that if you get in trouble in school, it will go on your Permanent Record and follow you the rest of your life.

Dave Barry gives a little illustration of how an incident on his permanent COULD follow him to adulthood. He is being interviewed for a job and the Personnel manager says:

"Your qualifications are excellent, Mr. Barry, but I see here in your Permanent Record that in the eighth grade you and Joseph Degiacinto flushed a lit cherry bomb down the boys' room toilet at Harold C. Crittenden Junior High School. ...Frankly, we're looking for people with more respect for plumbing than that."

Seriously, there are things that we each fear and there are times when we have to face that fear. In this morning's text, we learn three things to do when we face a fearful situation:

1. Don't anticipate disaster

First of all, do not anticipate disaster.

In our text, King Saul, his son Jonathan and 3,000 men were in a terrible predicament. For one thing, they were not well armed. In the next chapter, we are told that only Saul and Jonathan had spears and swords, the rest had no military arms. These poorly equipped men faced a Philistine force of 3,000 horse-drawn chariots, 6,000 cavalry and thousands of well equipped soldiers. No wonder Saul and his men were scared!

There are fearful situations that we each must face. ...A woman pregnant for the first time is usually happy, excited ...and scared, as the due date approaches. Some women feel it is their sacred duty to relate the most horrible and painful birth experience they have either had or heard about. Don't do that. She's already anxious.

People who have to address a large group of people are often anxious, which is another word for scared.

Brides and grooms often have fears about messing up their wedding ceremony. *Funniest Home Videos* has NOT helped this fear. I have not seen them, but have been told that there have been whole episodes of film clips showing brides tripping in the aisle and grooms fainting.

When asked to serve as an elder or deacon in the church, people are often worried, which is another name for scared, that they will either not have the time or the ability to do the job.

When then the medical test come back positive, EVERYone is scared.

It's OK to be afraid. God understands our fear and God empathizes with our fear. But God does NOT want us to STAY scared. Gerry Lewis went to the doctor's because he found a lump on his neck. A biopsy was taken and the doctor said, "Gerry, go home and don't worry."

Gerry said, "Doc, how do you not worry?"

Here's how Christians put in practice not worrying:

1. Pray and ask the Lord to give you hope and assurance. (And when you are scared, just say the name of Jesus; over and over if necessary.)
2. Talk to Christian friends and ask them to keep you in pray. (That is what Christian families are for!)
3. Imagine the BEST possible result of your situation and then focus your mind on this image when you begin to feel afraid.

What we want when we are imagining possible pain or disaster in the future is to have peace right now for this future possibility. The Lord does NOT work that way. Jesus will only give you what you need one day at a time.

That is the lesson from the manna. Remember manna was the food God provided the Israelites with when they left their servitude behind in Egypt. Every morning there was manna all over the ground like dew, but there was ONLY enough for each person and each family every day. Those who tried to collect more manna so they would have some ahead, found that it spoiled and was riddled with worms by the next day.

Such is faith. If we turn to the Lord in prayer and open our hearts to receive what the Lord has to give us, Jesus will provide what we need each and every day, even if the fear we face is as overwhelming as the army that faced Saul that day at Michmash.

2. Avoid the trap of try to please others

When you face a fearful situation, avoid the trap of trying to please those around you.

One of the reasons Saul was scared was that his troops were slipping away. Facing that huge military force with 3,000 unequipped men was scary enough, but when Saul's troops began to desert, and later we learn that he was down to 600 men, Saul became so anxious that he offered the sacrifice that only Samuel was supposed to offer.

We have to be very careful not to allow the words and actions of others to influence what we do. This is especially true if we are trying to do what God wants us to do. Why? Because every time we do what God wants us to do, there will be resistance. Often it is Satan who is attempting to prevent us from doing God's will. Sometimes it's simply the fact that the people around us may not want to do God's will, whatever it is. In the devotional *Jesus Calling*, Jesus tells Sarah Young something that relates to this matter. This is from May 3rd:

“You cannot serve two Masters. If I [Jesus] am your Master, you will desire to please Me above all others. If pleasing people is your goal, you will be enslaved to them. People can be harsh taskmasters when you give them this power over you.”

When being a parent, or grandparent, turns into a popularity contest, we cease to be a balanced parent or grandparent. If we do our job, there will be times when children are happy with us and times when they are furious with us. To be a good parent or grandparent, we must learn to cope with both extremes.

The same is true of being a Christian. There will be times when God asks us to do something that is pleasing to those we love and care about and they will be glad to follow. There will be other times when what God asks us to do something that seems annoying or threatening to those we love and care about and they will resist and refuse to follow.

Then we have a choice: to TRUST God and do what God asks us to do or do what others WANT us to do. If we always do what OTHERS want us to do, we will wind up doing something wrong just as Saul did.

3. Wait for the Lord

The third thing to do when you face a fearful situation is to wait for the Lord. If Saul had waited just a little bit longer, Samuel would have come, offered the sacrifice and Saul would have remained King of Israel and his descendents would have ruled after him. As it was, because he disobeyed God, God replaced Saul with David, who was a king after God's own heart.

Conclusion – Why Wait?

Why must we learn to wait, often beyond the point where we think there is not hope?
Perhaps this poem, by an unknown author, will give us an answer:

Desperately, helplessly, longingly, I cried,
and quietly, patiently, God replied.
I had pled and had wept for a clue to my fate,
yet the Master just said, "Child, you must just wait."

Wait? You say, wait, was my indignant reply.
Lord, I need answers. I need to know why.
Is your hand so short? Have you not heard?
By faith, I have asked, I am claiming your word.
My future and all to which I can relate
Now hangs in the balance, And you tell me to "wait."
I need a "yes," a go-ahead sign,
Or even a "no" to which I resign.

Besides Lord, you promised that if we believe
we need but to ask, and we shall receive.
So Lord, I've been asking. This is my cry.
I'm weary of asking. I need a reply.

Then quietly, softly, I learned of my fate.
The Master replied, "My child, please just wait."

So I slumped in my chair, defeated and taut,
and grumbled to God, "OK, I am waiting, but for what?"
He then seemed to kneel, His eyes wept with mine,
and tenderly said, "I could give you a sign."

I could shake the heavens, darken the sun,
I could raise the dead and cause mountains to run.
All you seek, I could give, and then pleased you would be.
You would have what you wanted, but you wouldn't know me.

You'd not know the depth of my love, my dear saint;
You'd not know the power I give to the faint;
You'd not learn to see through the clouds of despair,
that you need to trust, trusting simply, "I'm here."

You'd not know the joy of resting in me,
when darkness and silence are all you can see;
You'd not experience all of my love,
when the peace of my Spirit descends like a dove.

Oh, you'd know that I give, and I save...for a start,
but you'd miss the real joy of the depths of my heart.
You'd miss the glow of my comfort through the night
and the faith that I give when you walk without sight.

There's a depth far beyond getting what you ask;
the depth of my grace, getting what lasts.
You'd not know, should your pain quickly flee,
what it means when I say, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

You'd have your dreams for your loved ones, that's true,
But you'd miss, oh you'd miss, what I'm doing in you.

So be silent, my child, in time you will see
that my greatest gift is to get to know me.
And though oft my answers seem terribly late,
my most precious answer still is, "Please, just wait."

WHY does God ask us to wait, often beyond the point where we think there is no hope?

...So we will learn to TRUST Jesus and

learn NOT to trust other people, and

learn not to trust even ourselves.

Amen.