

When our grandchildren get together, one of their favorite topics to reminisce about is their camping trips with Grandpa. On a camping trip, the older grandchildren have greater responsibilities and privileges than the younger ones, and one rite of passage for them all was to be given a pocketknife of their own to carry.

The boys saw the knife as a sign that they were now more grown up and were able to follow directions and rules.

On one camping trip, Grandpa gave Will, who was about 5, a pocketknife, with the rule that he could only open and use it in Grandpa's presence and with his direction.

So Will promised to keep it in his pocket.

When they arrived at the campsite, Steve began setting up camp with the boys. A while later, he noticed Will sitting on the tailgate of the truck with his hands clasped behind him. Suddenly alarmed, Steve said, "Will, what do you have in your hands?"

Will looked at Grandpa, slowly brought his hands out, and said, "Blood." //

Will so thoroughly anticipated using his knife that he forgot the Number One Rule of Safety that Grandpa had ordered. We can understand his impatience, even see the humor and understand the anticipation in a young boy's eyes, perhaps remembering a time when we were children, and also had to pay the consequences!

Impatience had undermined Will's trust that Grandpa would soon teach him how to use the knife safely.

In the Habakkuk passage, Chapter 1, the Judeans are also waiting impatiently -- and imploring God to save them from their enemies. They are under siege, probably starving, and their lament is very loud and clear, for they have heard nothing but silence from God.

They cry out:

When all things are in disorder, when there is no equity or justice, and men abandon themselves into all kinds of wickedness, how long, Lord, will you continue to take no notice?

They think that God is either indifferent

or has a profound explanation that is beyond their understanding --

or it suggests that there is, after all, no God.

Waiting for deliverance is always a hard test of faith.

But Habakkuk faithfully sits in the watchtower and waits for an encouraging word from God to his people; and it finally comes to him in Chapter 2:

2 Then the LORD answered me and said:

"Write the vision; make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.

For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come!

Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them,
but the **righteous live by their faith.**

When we wait, and there is no immediate answer --

in fact, immediate answers rarely come --

our faith leaves room for hope that an answer will come, eventually. Many think that trials are punishments from God,

and they ask, "Why does God not answer the prayers of the faithful?"

Even Calvin asks in his commentary: "Is it God's purpose to prove patience and obedience in our faith?"

For even on the cross,

God the Father was silent to the cry of despair from his Son on the cross. Only on the third day did God give an answer, in the glorious resurrection.

In challenging times, when our future is uncertain,

God invites us to choose:

Will we let fear and anxiety consume us,

or will we choose to pray

and trust the one who holds our lives in his hands?

We're being called to trust not with a fraction of our hearts,

not with the parts that feel safe or comfortable, but with all that we are. We're

being asked to relinquish our grip on our own limited understanding

and to submit our ways -- our plans, our dreams, our fears --

to the wisdom and goodness of God. //

The new Christians in Thessalonica are having trouble discerning the truth from

teachings that are being taught by false teachers,

who declare that Christ has already come a second time

and that they can now live as they wish and not worry about the judgment of God. Paul

writes his letter to correct these teachings, and to say

that to know God and his grace through Jesus Christ is sufficient --

that to truly know God brings obedience and trust in him,

and that God is working in us to bring hope for the future.

Patience and hope are the true work of faith,

and by our faith God will be glorified in us,

for we will become what God has called us to be -- we will echo the master's word,

and become, in ourselves, the message.

Our church was erected and dedicated in 1965. In 2011, a committee was formed with

the purpose of renovating the sanctuary and 46 years later,

it was time to make changes.

We decided to call the capital campaign "Vision 2012,"

for we were confident we could accomplish the renovation

by the end of the next year!

Instead, we finally dedicated the sanctuary in the Fall of 2017.

We were completely surprised that it had taken that long to finish our dream!

It was necessary to raise funds for the project,

hire engineers for acoustics, lighting, and electrical updating,

an architect and designer, general contractors for flooring and painting,
and a plumber.

We even sealed and painted this ceiling with a special acoustical finish

that would not mar its natural beauty; but it took research,

and scaffolding to accomplish it all.

It was a time of change and emotional highs and lows;

some did not want the sanctuary to change and couldn't imagine a better space;

others preferred to cherish every detail of the past.

Yet you, the church, were faithful, and most generous through your volunteer
work, prayers, encouragement, and financial resources.

And now we have choral groups and instrumental ensembles who ask to present their
programs in this space, saying it is their preferred venue in the city.

It is a blessing to show hospitality to the larger community.

The process for the temporary and new pastor searches is similar.

We wish the search would take only a few months, even a year would be nice;

but there are many moving parts to the process, including our own part,
which is to encourage our friends, and pray for the committees,

that our church will find those who will lead us well

from this point into the future.

There may be times when voices of fear and doubt seem to drown out

the quiet confidence of faith, and in these moments we can hold on to prayer and patiently recall the assuring stories of God's great faithfulness to his people. These biblical stories deepen our faith as we wait in obedience and hope, because we understand the importance of the vision .

Writings of the early church fathers are a rich source of wisdom.

Men, and also women, moved to the desert to be alone, to devote themselves to the scriptures and their meaning in life.

In these writings is a story about a young monk who asked one of the older men why it was that so many people came out to the desert to seek God

and yet most of them gave up and returned to their lives in the city. The old man said,

"Last evening my dog saw a rabbit running for cover among the bushes of the desert and he began to chase the rabbit, barking loudly.

Soon other dogs joined in the chase, and they were barking and running as well. They ran a great distance and alerted many other dogs.

Soon the desert was echoing the sounds of their pursuit but the chase went on into the night.

After a little while, many of the dogs grew tired and dropped out.

A few chased the rabbit until the night was nearly spent.

By morning, only my dog continued the hunt."

"Do you understand," the old man said, "what I have told you?"

"No", replied the young monk, "please tell me father."

"It is simple," said the desert father, "My dog saw the rabbit." //

Relentless curiosity is a gift! When we turn our eyes to the Almighty One and ask,

"Who is this loving God, who teaches us to fill our minds with good things --

to meditate on things true, noble, and gracious --

to fully focus on the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly;

to notice things to praise, not things to curse?" -- we then can see the vision.

Something happens when words and thoughts become a part of us.

We can see that God has put his hand on this church for something new!

We can wait -- and trust the search committees to do their work.

We come today to the Table to remember the work and gifts

of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shows us how to live --

not only by his own sacrificial life

but by his word left to us in the scriptures, written down and

preserved by all the saints who have come before us.

We are descendants of this Holy Family of God,

who wait with open hearts and minds to receive the wisdom

that will fix our brokenness and make us whole,

and more able to love as God loves.

We relentlessly seek God as an irresistible beam of light

that is always shining before us, to fully see him, know him,

and receive his grace that we extend to each other.

Love is a priceless gift that teaches us to be patient and kind,

to live beyond ourselves so that others may know what it is to be loved and

cherished as children of God.

Amen.