

**Sermon: The Time In Between 1 John 3:1-11**  
**Menno Mennonite Church**  
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We've had quite the year so far. We did Christmas, then Epiphany, then we journeyed through Lent, Celebrated Jesus' last hours on Maundy Thursday and then celebrated Christ's wonderful, timely and ever relevant resurrection on Sunday.

And now what? Well, now we wait some more.

I hate waiting.

I've heard from you too – you too have had to wait. This waiting has been so difficult, hasn't it? Waiting is hard because we want NOW what's coming next.

The time between the now and the not yet is hard. It is hard, not because we're impatient, but because we don't know what to do with ourselves in that in between time. Strange things have been known to happen to us in times between. But more accurately, strange things have been known to happen **within** us.

Let me give you some biblical examples of what happened when people were in that "time between".

- a. Adam and Eve: You know they had it good – they had each other, they had a great relationship with God, they had good food, friendly animals, a gorgeous garden to live in everything they could ever want – but they wanted more...that ... that illusive ... thing and so it was actually quite easy to tempt them to betray their promises...
- b. And Abraham and Sarah – following God's leading – God promising to be with them – giving them blessing upon blessing – crops and herds and the promise of descendants. But even though they knew God's promise to them, they still did not believe that it would ever happen – so in the time between God's promise and its fulfilment they took advantage of Hagar's fertility, causing her to birth Ishmael. When Sarah finally received her blessing in the birth of her son, Isaac, she, in her jealousy, kicked Hagar and Ishmael into the desert to die.
- c. Moses and the Hebrews in the wilderness – you know THAT's all about waiting in the time between. They left Egypt and slavery and spent a loooooong time in that time between waiting to enter the promised land. And there's countless stories there about what happened when the people were waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled...they got bored, they became afraid, they forget the promise and decided to go their own way...and then, the ground opened up, the snakes came...and so on.
- d. And then there's Jonah – poor poor Jonah who, when he actually got to the place that he didn't really want to be at, he decided that he wasn't really that impressed with the outcome of God's promise anyway.
- e. Skipping over a few hundred years we come to where we are now on the church calendar. It was a dangerous time Roman "peacemakers," the temple guard and a whole pile of family and neighbours were out to get 11 + followers and disciples. And so, they all holed up in a locked room and reminisced about what they learned, and how they learned and who they learned it from. To grieve together, to discern together about what to do next.

The women who went to the tomb met, instead of their dead friend and teacher, two men in dazzling clothes who reminded the women what Jesus told them when he was still in Galilee, "that the Son of Man

must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” The women remembered his words, and after returning to the rooms where the disciples were hiding, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. But these words seemed to the disciples as an idle tale, and they did not believe the women.

So, disbelieving, they waited together to discern together what next to do. In the meantime, - in the time between the women’s account and what they feared as their discovery by the authorities, a couple of the disciples left to go off to Emmaus, and when the two came back that same night – rejoicing upon meeting Jesus, the disciples said that Jesus had also appeared to Peter...but they weren’t really sure whether that was true.

Yet, when they were discussing all of that, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Strange things happen when we are waiting – in that “dead space” in that “time between” ...we get bored, we may become afraid, we can start doubting what we’ve learned, we sometimes forget what’s been promised, we stop believing witnesses, ...and many times we may start making up stories that may or may not be sound.

In the time between, the disciples were lost and, trying to make sense of the last days, were convincing themselves that what Jesus had promised did not and would not come to pass.

They did not believe the women, Peter, the two on the Emmaus journey. In Luke 24:37 we read that “They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost when Jesus appeared to them.

But Jesus said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”

They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

“Friends,” he said, “You are witnesses of these things.”

“Now, wait again. Be patient for I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The power of what? How will we know? How long do we have to wait?

The disciples had only 40 days or so after the resurrection to glean from Jesus all that they could – Peter was forgiven, the disciples were instructed and commanded to go out and spread the good news of God's love to the world...and then Jesus ascended into heaven.

Before he ascended, he ordered his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said in Acts 1 "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." So, when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

When? When will he come? More waiting. Waiting to receive power when the Holy Spirit will come upon them. And then...Waiting for Christ to come again.

Strange things happen when we are waiting. We may get bored, tired of waiting, fearful, paranoid, we make things up, we start thinking things that maybe aren't the way they should be. If we're all alone – this can be really dangerous – things that used to make sense start to get all distorted and we can start to think things happened in ways that they didn't, and we start to think people said things that they didn't...

Well, in the meantime, in the time between Christ's ascension and his return, the church got together, appointed more leaders – to fill in for Judas and other disciples that were lost – they received the Holy Spirit – yay! – Saul came and persecuted the church – and then his path was converted – and he changed his name to Paul – the Christian leaders in Jerusalem debated with Paul and other missionaries with regards to whether Christ came just for the Jews or for all people – Communities of Christ followers sprang up all over the Mediterranean – sharing together a common purse – providing care for all in their community...and learned that life together. This new community of Christ' followers sounded wonderful. But waiting for Christ's return wasn't all wonderful.

In the time between people got tired of waiting for Christ to return. And sometimes the longer we wait, the more likely we are to think that what has been promised will not happen. Factions fractioned, false teachers and false teachings taught false truths...what was the truth anymore? If only Christ would come back and let us know!

The writer of 1 John wrote to a community that was struggling in the time-between. They wondered:

Was Jesus actually human?

Did he have flesh and blood – or was he only an illusion?

How do we know that God's spirit dwells in us?

What's our place in the world?

Do we have a place in this world?

What will we be when Christ returns?

Is there forgiveness of sins?

What does it mean to be called a child of God?

What do I do with my sister or brother with whom I disagree?

To this, the writer of the 1<sup>st</sup> epistle of John wrote in chapter 3: 1-11

See what love the Father has given us,  
that we should be called children of God;  
and that is what we are.

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Beloved, we are God's children now;  
what we will be has not yet been revealed.

What we do know is this:  
when he *is* revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.  
You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.  
No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

Little children, let no one deceive you.  
Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.  
Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.  
The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.  
Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them;  
they cannot sin because they have been born of God.  
The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right  
are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.  
For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

Throughout all of history – Biblical and non-biblical history – people have been waiting in between. We  
still, today, are in the time between receiving the holy spirit and witnessing Christ's return. Strange  
things creep into our thoughts while we wait in the time between.

How have we lived in the between time?

We've forgotten the message that we've heard from the beginning that whispers and shouts and rings  
through the ages - from long before our time of waiting in between - that Yahweh God was and is and is  
to come and that we are God's beloved.

And so, my friends, as children of God, as ones claimed by God living here right now as we wait in this  
time in between – do not be discouraged. But walk upright and gently on this journey until Christ's  
return.

Amen, may it be so.