First Presbyterian Church
Psalm 62, "Wait for the Lord"
by Pastor Matt Johnson, 11/6/2022

Well, folks, the month of October is finally over. What a wait that was.
The desire in my house for Halloween to come was overwhelming.

We had to work out what to do for costumes,
worrying about the candy, wondering where we'll go trick-or-treating,
questions about whether various monsters were real …
and that was just my wife, Sonja!

And now the wait begins for Thanksgiving, and then the wait for Christmas.

There are other waits we have:
waits for medical appointments,
waits for conversations we'd rather not have,
waits to see how the economy will turn out,
waiting for stoplights to change, waiting for someone to share a conversation with.

Sometimes we lie in wait … like a predator.
We wait for the right moment to make a special request, to buy a house,
to sell stock, to seize the upper hand in some way
so that we can stay in control.

What are you waiting for?

Today I want to challenge you to discover a different kind of waiting in prayer.
In this prayer, we don't come first … God does.

In the NRSV the phrase that provides structure to this prayer of David
is, **"My soul waits for God alone."**

These are the first words of the psalm and they are repeated in verse five.

David presents an alternative to all the other forms of waiting I reviewed earlier.

"My soul waits for God … alone."

In prayer, our waiting is singular and focused.
At first, we may assert ourselves and our needs, our anxieties.
We may foist our plans and hopes onto God initially.
But eventually, we run out of words and move to a place of listening,
submitting ourselves before God and … waiting in silence.

Eugene Peterson is wonderful on this point:
"Silence is prerequisite to hearing," he writes in his book, "*Where Your Treasure Is*." "If we reject silence, our words are reduced to puffing our own shriveled selves. If we talk all the time, or let others talk all the time, our ears and mouths are filled with clichés and platitudes, mindless chatter and pretentious gibberish. In silence language is renewed. In the absence of human sound it becomes possible to hear the *logos*, the Word of God that gives shape and meaning to our words."

In prayer, the Psalms teach us, we wait for God alone.
When was the last time you prayed with that frame of mind?

The world expects us to have ready answers,
comprehensive plans, savings in place for all scenarios.

When we wait before God, we find that we don't have to assert ourselves.
There's no posturing as though we have it all together.

Earlier in the service we remembered those who have died in the past year.
Do you think they are concerned any more
about how they seem to others?

They share the perspective of David who waits on the Lord to provide security.
In verse two he writes,
"The Lord alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress."
Rock, salvation, fortress.

It's God who provides stability, escape from danger, and protection.
These three qualities of being in God's presence
establish a space where we have all that we need.

Self-assertion and self-reliance are only a smokescreen.
It's waiting on God that provides a truly secure sense of self.
As a result, David can say, **"I will not be greatly moved."**

In verses 3-4 David describes a community set on
toppling over the faithful servant of God.
David was a king so he had many natural enemies.

But ordinary people also face immense pressures.
Sonja and I were just talking about how even when planning for meals
there are a lot of enemies we confront:
Environmental concerns about how food is processed and packaged,
the latest health dos and don'ts, trying not to have too much meat,
keeping in mind who likes what foods, rising costs due to inflation …
going to the grocery store can feel like entering a battlefield!

We face pressures of all sorts that threaten to knock us over when we're weak:.
It can feel like there's a conspiracy to tell you that you're not enough,
that you won't make it, that you need to do things better
in order to make the mark.

All of this comes from placing ourselves at the center of the universe,
rather than God.

In the first four verses, David is looking at all the people who are against him,
but in second set of four verses, David looks to God.
The tone changes dramatically.

And so in v. 5 David returns to the theme he began with,
"My soul waits for God alone,"
and this time he adds, **"For my hope is in him."**

When we wait on God alone, we not only set aside our initiatives,
we also demonstrate our faith that we pray to a God who *takes* initiative.

David is teaching us to pray with expectation that God meets us,
engages with us and takes action in the world.

The second stanza closes with a direct address to the people of God in v. 8:
"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us."

It's easy for us to get caught up in trying to be
what everyone else thinks we should be, and lose sight of the fact
that God is really and truly on our side.
When times are bad, we can trust in the Lord.
And the same goes when times are good!

A friend of mine in Minneapolis knew that he had a much harder time
handling success than failure. He expected failure.
But when things started going right,
that's when he really started to get nervous.

And so we trust in God *at all times.*
In prayer we pour out our hearts before the one who created us,
loves us, knows us, and holds us.

The third section begins in verse 9 with a leveling of the playing field.
Though David prays as the anointed King of Israel
he has no time for playing the rich and the poor against each other.

**"Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion;
in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath."**

On one side of the scales you place the worth of the working class,
the homeless, prisoners. What are they – nothing more than a breath. [whoo]

On the other side we place suburban success stories, college graduates,
land-owners, politicians, CEOs and world leaders. What are they?
A DELUSION.
Their self-proclaimed security is a figment of their imagination.

Taken all together, they are less than nothing – even lighter than a breath.

Neither the trust-fund baby nor the welfare baby has an advantage
when it comes to happiness.

Apart from God, the rich and the poor alike spend their lives clamoring for more.

This is a helpful word for me.
The United States prides itself on being a land of opportunity,
but I find that we are extremely class conscious –
and this creeps into my own consciousness as well.

When we wait for God alone, our circumstances, whatever they may be,
are of no use in getting us ahead, nor do they hold us back.

The last insight from David comes in v. 10,
we should put no confidence in extortion
or the increase of our bank balances.

You could hardly construct a more counter-cultural mindset
if you spent all day working at it.

Whole industries are based on extortion of labor from around the world.
At the same time, we have extraction based extortion
that causes us to be addicted to the use of limited resources.
And we are constantly told by the media to be very afraid
if the economy is going badly,
or to feel emboldened when things are going well.

Put no confidence in such messages, David says.

How should we respond? Again, Eugene Peterson counsels that
"through the prayer of Psalm 62 we flank the enemy and practice a life
that is lived lightly and cheerfully,
without the enormous baggage of bluff and bravado
that the self-assertive lug around to mask their weakness…
the issue is not *whether* things get done
but *who* gets them done, God or me."

Let us learn to pray as people who wait on God.
Let us take God's initiative to be a thing of real substance
in our lives and not be constantly trying to control the future.

In marking All Saints Day,
we have named those that we've lost this year.
In doing so, there's an intent to wait for God alone.

In loss, there is often a sense of being impotent –
unable to say or do anything that makes a difference.
When we train our souls to wait on the Lord,
we can take comfort that we are not alone.
We are connected to the One whom we belong to
in life and in death.