

As we celebrate our moms, consider how motherhood begins with such anticipation. I can't imagine anything more suspenseful than carrying a life in one's womb, waiting for 9 months for the moment of birth and the first sound from a new voice that is already known.

When I graduated from Seminary, our national church body was in turmoil and trapped in a political struggle. After four years of college and four years of seminary, none of us knew if we would ever be pastors. We were told by many we would never be welcome in this church body. The conflict was as intense as our recent presidential election. Over the summer all of my friends got jobs as pastors, but I was still without a call in September and coming to grips with the reality that eight years of college and seminary training might have been wasted. I couldn't stand the suspense. How long would I have to wait?

Our Gospel today speaks of people complaining that Jesus was keeping them in suspense. *"Can't you give us more of what we want? Can't you prove that you are who you say you are?"* How often in our world do we hear similar complaints? *"God isn't clear enough! Not involved enough! Why does he wait while the good suffer and evil seems to have an upper hand?" Why does God make us wait for what we think he should do?"*

Too often we endure suspense similar to Jesus' followers. We want all the answers, on our terms, now! We ask God to create a scenario for ME rather than simply live by faith. But suspense was the purpose of Jesus' entire ministry. He came so that the waiting could end.

From the beginning God had shared answers and from the beginning our complaint has always been "those aren't the answers we want." A manger and an empty tomb are gifts to end the suspense, answer our questions, and lead us into a new life!

God arrived in the flesh to end all suspense. But his detractors (then and now) don't recognize Him *because they don't want to!* If God doesn't meet all expectations and demands, they aren't sure they want to listen or learn. Like politicians who can't trust each other those who most disappointed with Jesus are those who want to control God.

Jesus said that some don't recognize him because they have other priorities and voices they would rather follow. They don't know the shepherd's voice as they live in a different flock. Just as any mother always recognizes her crying child in a crowd, we all know the voice of those we love. And God knows our voice, our cares, and our cries.

How much time to you wait for God to do what you want, or not even acknowledge his presence? When a spouse asks, "Why don't you tell me more often that you love me?" it isn't that they don't know but need to hear the voice that calms all fears. Sometimes questions are not questions but reminders of

what has been forgotten. Sometimes a question is a way to remember which voice is our most important voice.

Jesus came because a sinful world was hanging in the balance; suspended between heaven and earth; caught between listening to God's voice in the garden and the serpent sneaking in from the sidelines. God chose to use his earthly voice to end such suspense once and for all. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was the voice of our shepherd announcing his commitment to love – no matter what! Our goal is NOT to seek a "god" who fits my demands but to love the God who shaped himself to love me! Just like our response to a mother's faithful love, when I am touched by unselfish love, how can I not love?

People complained that Jesus was keeping them in suspense. (What they meant was "Why can't you tell us what we want to hear? Why are you making us wait?") *But he had and he would! It was their assumptions that were the problem.* The irony was they were keeping Jesus in suspense. Would they believe? By asking, *'IF you ARE Messiah?'* they revealed they had already closed their ears! For the same reason, when a loved one says, "you don't love me, do you?" The cat is out of the bag and a problem is in the air.

Jesus used the image of a shepherd because sheep know the voice of their shepherd and follow only him. We have had dogs who could be funning full out after a rabbit, but if they heard our voice, they would stop the chase (or at least pause to turn around to take a peek.) Remember Mary's confusion at Easter, and how it took hearing his voice for her to finally see it was Him! Jesus was right next to her, and she missed the obvious, until she heard the voice of love that hand changed her life.

We live in a world filled with confusion about life and death and everything in between. Christ's goal is to end our uncertainty. Just as we wouldn't keep loved ones in suspense why keep any of God's loved ones away from the way, the truth, and the life? My son in St. Louis had a boss from England, who was impossible to work for. He had never been in Chris's building, was new to America, didn't know how things worked, and didn't know anything about this culture. He didn't want to be bothered to get to know his employees. He was only interested in demands that he assumed would make him look good and wondered why so many didn't understand his orders.

One week he came to Chris and casually wondered why St. Louis was such a religious city. Coming from England, he said he was not used to anyone going to church and found Sunday mornings are spent differently here. He wanted to know why that was, and why people would live that way? That offered a great opportunity for a very different conversation than Chris ever expected.

For Easter-people there are no surprises, *only opportunities for ministry!* Who do you know who is living with the suspense of not knowing Jesus? And how might God's voice be heard through you?

For the past few years of his life, my dad was very withdrawn. He didn't initiate conversations but how special it is for me when I heard him laugh, or he simply

said, "Hi, Tim." (Isn't it the greatest when we hear the voice of someone we love so much?) Ever time I went to visit I was in suspense, and realized I was just waiting to hear his voice.

For us it is the same, once you have heard the voice of Jesus why not do all we can to ensure others hear and feel of that same love? *We have a responsibility to those whom we choose to love, but also to all whom our God loves! Our call as disciples is to end EVERYONE'S suspense!!!* How tragic if friends, co-workers, people on street would ever have to ask us "how long will you keep us in suspense? When will you show us Messiah? Easter has restored our breath. The suspense is over. The only issue remaining is to decide whose voice you will follow and whose voice will others hear in you?