

“Continuing the Conversation”

First Presbyterian Church, Kingwood

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Recently I came across a book with a title you don't see every day. It was a four letter word! No, not any of the ones you're probably think of right now! No when I first saw it, the title of this book looked more to me like something you might see on a vanity license plate, one you might put on the back of a red Ferrari. The four letters were FSTR: Faster! And they were written so fast that the apparently the author didn't even think about adding vowels.

Fortunately the subtitle slowed things down, at least a little bit. It read *The Acceleration of Just about Everything*. And when I pushed past the cover page and opened up the book I discovered that subtitle was pretty accurate. The book is full of facts and stories that show collective that everything we do today from cooking to communications to commerce is being done faster. Even the rate at which we measure fast is getting faster.

So ... tell me ... what's the fastest measure of time you know? Is it seconds? If it is, you're way too slow! Because over the last few decades we've moved from seconds to nanoseconds to femtoseconds. And if you don't know what a femtosecond is, it's defined by physicists as a temporal measurement that's roughly equal to the time it takes to travel across the width of an atom. That's fast!

Of course science inevitably affects business. And currently one of the most used measures to gauge the strength of a business has to do with the speed at which it can manufacture, market and distribute a product. But there's still another level. For what happens in science and business eventually filters down to society and the family. And families, as all of you are well aware, are learning how to use technology like cell phones and computer programs to pick up the pace of interpersonal communications.

Milan Kundera, a Czech novelist wrote recently that "speed is the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on humanity." And I think he's right. Don't you? Because the truth is while I may not be exactly ecstatic about it I really do like a lot of things in my life to move faster. I like express lanes at the checkout counter to move faster when I'm in them. I like microwave popcorn to pop faster when I'm at home watching a movie. I like download speeds to work faster when

I'm working on my laptop. I like all those things to go FSTR. So for me fast is fabulous, most of the time. Until it isn't! Until my life gets going too fast and I start making mistakes and looking foolish.

And that's where I think the disciples are at the beginning of the first chapter of Acts. "Lord," they ask, "are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Eugene Peterson re-translates their question in *The Message*. "Master, "are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?"

You see the question reflects the speed at which things had been happening for them. Everything had been going faster for them since Easter morning. First there was the empty tomb. Then there was Jesus' appearance to Mary. Then there was the conversation that happened when Jesus met two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

We heard about that last week on Easter Sunday morning, remember? Remember how Jesus opened their minds to understand all the Scriptures? It was all coming together for them ... fast. They could see it now; the way God was working things out. The promises of the prophets; they were all coming true. And there was more. For Jesus had told them they were going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. It was going to happen in a just a few more days." It was incredible. It was exhilarating. But it was too fast. Too fast for the disciples to understand what God was really doing.

So fast turned to foolish, and in response to the disciples question Jesus replies, "It's not for you to know the time or dates the Father's set by his own authority." In other words, Jesus is telling his disciples, "Slow down. Slow down. you don't need to know everything about God's plans. But you need to know what God wants you to do. Remember what I told you, what I promised you. You'll receive the Spirit. You'll become my witnesses. That's what you need to know. Stay focused on that." Then Luke says, Jesus "was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight." And they were forced to wait.

When was the last time you were forced to wait? For most of us it probably hasn't been that long. According to recent statistics, the average American is forced to wait over 50 times in the course of a day. Those waits include time spent waiting in traffic, waiting at stoplights, waiting on hold on the phone, waiting in lines, waiting for elevators to come, and the list goes on.

But I don't wait to force you to wait any longer this morning. So let me ask you a question? What do you do with all the waiting times in your life? Because you see the interesting thing to me about the story in Acts is this. When they were forced to wait, Jesus' followers decided to pray.

"They all joined together constantly in prayer." That's the line Luke uses to tell us about it. But before you start to put halos on all the men and women who were there in that upper room and distance them from us, think with me for a minute, will you? Think about what it means to be "constantly in prayer."

If you go and look it up in the dictionary you'll discover that the first definition given for the word "constantly" is this, "marked by a firm or steadfast commitment or faithfulness." And the second definition for the word is like the first. It talks about "a habit of uniform practice." In fact, this may surprise you, but it's not until the third level of definition that Webster's dictionary starts talking about "constantly" as a word that's related to a "continual action."

So if you've always read Acts 1 with a picture in your mind; a picture of a prayer meeting in an upper room that lasted continuously from the time it began to the day of Pentecost, I need to tell you something. You'd better take it down. You'd better put that imaginary picture out of your mind. Because the reality was probably pretty different.

You see when Luke says Jesus' followers were "joined together constantly in prayer," he isn't trying to describe a really long prayer, he's trying to describe a really deep commitment, a firm, steadfast commitment Jesus' first followers made to each other to pray, to pray together and to pray individually, to pray for the one thing that mattered to all of them; the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to them.

Emma Gray wasn't part of that group. But if she'd had the opportunity, I think she would have been. You see Emma Gray lived most of her life in the 20th century. She died last year. She was 95. At the time of her death last June, there was quite a story about her in the *Washington Post* because for years Emma was the woman who cleaned the office of the President of the United States. Her official title was "Charwoman of the Oval Office." And with that title, she served six presidents for 24 years.

What makes the story even more compelling though is the fact that Emma Gray was a Christian, a Christian who'd made a deep commitment from her first day as Charwoman. Each night when she cleaned the Oval Office, Emma Gray would pause in her cleaning. She would stand behind the President's chair for a few minutes and as she stood there, she would pray. Her co-workers cleaning the outer offices could sometimes hear her. They would look in and see her there, cleaning cloth in one hand, the other on the back of the President's chair.

Reflecting on the way she did her work and lived her life at her memorial service her pastor said, "Emma saw life through the eyes of God's promise. That's the way I'd put it. You couldn't be around Emma and not know what she believed. She believed we're supposed to pray for our leaders, for those in authority over us, to pray for wisdom and trust God to give it to them. So on Sundays she prayed in church and the rest of the week she prayed in the Oval Office. But she always prayed. She was constant in prayer."

So let's ask ourselves a question this morning. Are we people who are constant in prayer, are we people who pray individually and corporately for God be at work in our church and in our country? And if we aren't, is there a way that we could be, or at least a way we could start?

Well let me suggest something to you. Let me take you back to the beginning of this sermon, to the part where I told you that the average American is forced to wait over 50 times a day. Suppose, just suppose with me for a minute; suppose you and I agreed today to take a few of those forced waits in our lives, at a red light or in a lobby waiting for an elevator, suppose we took a few of those short waits and turned them into short prayers.

Suppose we made a commitment to do that here this morning, individually and collectively as God's people. Do you think it would make a difference in the life of our church or the life of our country. I suppose we'll never know ... unless we try, will we?

Let's pray, shall we?