

Waiting on God

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him” Luke 2:25

Let see if you recognize these words: “You can get so confused that you’ll start in to race down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space, headed, I fear, toward a most useless place. The Waiting Place ... for people just waiting. Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go or the mail to come, or the rain to go, or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No or waiting for their hair to grow. Everyone is just waiting.” Do you recognize these words?

These well-known and well-loved words come from Dr. Seuss’ book, *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*. The section I read to you describes one of the many challenges faced in the book, The Waiting Place. In a creative and colorful way, Dr. Seuss captures the familiar sentiment that people have toward waiting throughout their lives. Waiting is pointless and worthless, or as Dr. Seuss put it, “a most useless place.”

To the many waiting options that Dr. Seuss has in this book, there’s another that we can add, waiting on God. In so many ways, the life of the Christian and the faith that a believer is given, is all about waiting on God. In fact, I’m sure that the case could be made that Dr. Seuss’ Waiting Place and Christ’s Church have many similarities and might to some be the same place. Everyone is just waiting. Whether this connection is made by those on the outside looking in or those on the inside looking out, that useless feeling toward waiting can very easily be transferred to a useless feeling toward being a Christian.

So, what about you? Have you found yourself waiting on God? Has your waiting led you to feelings that being a Christian is useless, pointless and worthless? Now, you and I might not like to confess this challenging circumstance that wrestling with waiting on God makes us question our Christian identity. And not that this makes this sinful struggle right, but the reality is that we’re not alone, not even by a long shot. The Bible is full of examples where this sinful struggle existed and even our own experiences with those around us reveal this ongoing battle.

We could remember Abraham and Sarah and their wrestling with God’s promise of a son. We could remember the Israelite slaves in Egypt as they waited on God’s deliverance for hundreds of years. We could remember the exiles and their waiting for the Lord to restore them back into the Promised Land. We could remember our relatives and friends, who’ve waited on answers, healing, success, etc. from the Lord. In remembering these examples, the struggle to wait on the Lord becomes very real and clear. These examples highlight individuals who in their waiting also wrestled with their identity as believers.

This weekend, our Gospel reading highlights another individual waiting on God and his name was Simeon. We don’t have a lot of details about Simeon in the Bible. What you heard in this passage from Luke 2 is it. Yet, what details we are given show us that Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. In other words, Simeon was waiting on God to fulfill his promise about the Messiah. He was looking for the Savior whom God had foretold through the prophets of old. As Simeon waited, he was given a promise that he would see the Messiah, the Lord’s Christ, before he died.

The Bible is silent on many other details we would like to know. How long did Simeon have to wait? Was he nearing the end of his life? Did Simeon begin to question his faith like so many others who had waited on God? We simply don’t have answers to these questions. And yet, Scripture shares with us one detail that might be easily overlooked but was so important to Simeon’s wait. The Holy Spirit was upon him and it was the Holy Spirit who revealed that promise to him that he would get to see Jesus before he died. God the Holy Spirit sustained Simeon during his wait.

Here’s the crucial piece for us from Simeon’s story, as Simeon waited on God, it was God who sustained him through this wait. The endurance and encouragement that Simeon needed to continue his watch for the Messiah was given to him by the Holy Spirit. Simeon wasn’t left to his own devices to faithfully cling and watch for God’s fulfillment, he was spurred on by the Holy Spirit to remain vigilant until

the moment arrived. And when the moment came, by the help of the Holy Spirit, Simeon was ready to recognize God's promise kept in the baby Jesus and bless and thank God for following through on His promise.

Now this is quite a leap from this moment in Biblical history, but if you'll move ahead with me to the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, we'll find a great connection for us to this Simeon moment. At the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, He promised the pouring out of God the Holy Spirit in a very clear and complete way. We call that moment Pentecost in the church calendar. That Pentecost moment was the start of Christ's Church here on earth and highlighted the fact that God the Holy Spirit would be upon each member of Christ's Church.

This means that for us, as believers on other side of Pentecost, we too have the Holy Spirit upon us. Like Simeon before us, God the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives to sustain and support us as we continue to wait on God. And like Simeon, we have a promise that the Holy Spirit continuously reveals to us. Jesus, the One who died and rose for us, who has forgiven us, is coming back for us. The same God who remembered Simeon in his waiting, is the same God who remembers us in our waiting.

By the same Holy Spirit, we are led to places where our endurance and encouragement might be increased. God the Holy Spirit leads us to the Bible so that we might hear and know of God's promises made to us and be assured of God's faithfulness in keeping His promises. He leads us to the font day after day so that we might be reminded that just as we have died with Christ in the waters of baptism so too we will rise with Christ when Christ returns. By the Holy Spirit we are also nourished at the Lord's Table with Christ's Body and Blood so that we might be strengthened and guarded in this life until life everlasting. The foundation of our comfort, assurance and encouragement as we wait for God is anchored in these gifts of Word and Sacrament and thanks be to God these are gifts that He will provide until He returns.

And the assurance, encouragement and endurance that God the Holy Spirit brings us through these gifts also remains vital to our waiting on God is every other aspect of our lives. Yes, we are ultimately waiting for Jesus' return, but in the everyday moments we experience, we are also waiting on God for numerous other things. Again, the Holy Spirit reveals to us that we have a Lord and Savior who knows our every need. Jesus, healed the sick, fed the hungry, comforted the brokenhearted and raised the dead during His earthly ministry and now He remains powerfully aware of the tiniest of details in our own lives.

It's God's Word that puts before us example after example where our God provides for the physical needs of this body and life. Upon our lips, His Word places our continuous prayer that He would give us our daily bread. It's God's Word attached to bread and wine that brings healing to the sinful heart, medicine for the soul. And from this reality we can be encouraged, that He who can heal the soul can also heal the body now and for all of eternity. It's God's Word attached to water that makes Christ's resurrection our resurrection. So even as we presently walk in this valley of the shadow of death we have real hope that the experience of death we face in this life isn't the end.

Yes, you and I we're waiting on God. But our waiting on God isn't pointless, worthless or useless. As we wait, God the Holy Spirit will sustain us just as He did Simeon during his wait. The endurance and encouragement that Simeon needed to continue his watch for the Messiah was given to him by the Holy Spirit. So also, the endurance and encouragement we need to keep watch for Jesus' return is given to us by the Holy Spirit. Simeon wasn't left to his own devices to faithfully cling and watch for God's fulfillment, and neither are we. He was spurred on by the Holy Spirit to remain vigilant until the moment arrived and once again the Holy Spirit is at work spurring us on to remain vigilant. So that when the moment comes, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we too like Simeon will be ready to recognize God's promise keeping in Jesus and bless and thank God for following through on His promise. **“Lord, now you are letting your servant (s) depart in peace, according to your word; for my(our) eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”** (Luke 2:29-32) Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan