

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Luke 2:25-38

Sermon Title: "Who Are We Waiting For?"

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Do any of us like to wait? Do any of us like to sit around or stand around, and wait for something to happen?

In this fast-food, high-speed computer micro-processing society, we do not want to wait for anything. We visit the doctor and have to sit in the office for half an hour, while others seem to arrive and go back to the examining room ahead of us. The nurse finally calls us to come back, and it's another 15-20 minutes before the doctor sees us. I had to get Hepatitis shots for the Youth Mission trip to Costa Rica this summer, and it took one and a half hours to receive two shots.

We hate standing in the check-out line at the store. We stand on tiptoes and try to peer over the counters to see if there is another line much faster. We always get behind the person who has to write out the entire check after the cashier gives the total. We have to stand behind the person who has to count all the pennies and nickels in their wallet (story of police call and pennies). Don't get me started about sitting at

traffic lights. All the hours I have spent, all the gasoline I have wasted, waiting for the invisible traffic to cross the intersection from left to right. We are not a people who are excited about waiting.

Today we read about two people who had to wait. We have a man we know nothing about: Simeon. He appears when Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to have him purified according to Mosaic Law. In the Book of Leviticus, it says forty days after a birth, a male child must be presented to the priests for purification and dedication to God.¹ Mother Mary and Father Joseph are pious Jews, so they will follow the law. We think that the story would continue with them, especially after reading about the miraculous birth of Jesus, but then Simeon jumps in and steals the spotlight.

He is a just and devout man, we are told. The Holy Spirit is upon him, and he is waiting for “the Consolation of Israel” to be revealed.² In other words, The Comforter of Israel, The Hope of a nation to deliver it from oppression. Devout Simeon has no clue who this Consolation of Israel will be. He isn’t told what the Consolation will look like or sound like, or how old this Consolation will be... He isn’t even told how this

¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Luke*, cf. 38.

² Cf. Luke 2:25.

Consolation will deliver Israel: will he come on a horse, will he have an entourage following him, or what? The Holy Spirit within Simeon says this Person will arrive at some point before his death. So Simeon waits. And he waits. And he waits, longer than we would at the doctor's office, longer than at a traffic light (longer than at 1000 red lights). Who knows how long Simeon had to wait. It could have been for his entire life.

There is another odd character who shows up in the Temple with Simeon: a woman by the name of Anna. She is a prophetess from the line of Asher, so Anna has some clout in the Temple. She is a direct descendant of one of the tribes of Israel.

Anna is also a widow at the age of 84. What does a widow do after her husband dies? Some widows shut down and decide they cannot live on. They may refuse to go back to church, or even leave the house. Anna doesn't forget her husband, but she doesn't shut down. She goes back to church. Every single day and every single night, she is in the Temple praying and fasting and waiting. God told her to wait for something to happen, not the discovery of a new husband but the discovery of Israel's Consolation, Comforter, and Hope. So along with Simeon she waits. And she waits. And she waits.

Don't think waiting back in Anna's and Simeon's time was any easier than today. Maybe they didn't have doctor's offices or traffic lights or lines at the checkout counter, but even then there were people who did not like to wait. We don't know what Simeon's or Anna's temperament was. Were they patient people and could have waited for years, or were they so impatient that they grumbled and complained to God every day they didn't see the Consolation of Israel?

What do we do, while we wait? Do we grumble and complain? Do we make trouble for others and set them on edge, just because we are so impatient? Do we get ourselves into some trouble that we have a difficult time getting out of?

We don't read about Simeon and Anna lounging around the house, watching TV or surfing the Interweb. We don't hear about them sitting at home and waiting for the Consolation of Israel to come to them. They get up and they get out. They go to the Temple, and they wait in the Temple for God's promise to show up, because that is where God's promise will appear.

We cannot just sit back and wait for God to reveal his promises, or even to make his promises real. Our faith is not an armchair quarterback faith, in which we just sit and make comments, while God makes

everything happen. Faith is active. God is active in and through us. God's promises go forward when we go forward. Simeon and Anna went to the Temple of God day and night.

And what did they do in the Temple? Again, sit around and wait. No, they prayed. Every day and every night Anna prayed. Luke doesn't tell us specifically what Simeon, but we can be sure that he had many conversations with God. He might have spent time composing that wonderful song that he sings to the Christ Child, when he finally appears.³

Waiting is not a passive thing, and neither is prayer. I like what John Waller says in his song, *While I'm Waiting*: "I will serve you while I'm waiting. I will worship while I'm waiting. I'll be running the race even while I wait." Waiting is not a boring sit-around-and-see-what-happens event – it is active. It is aggressively active. So is prayer, aggressively active in seeking God and God's will. We tend to think praying is boring, because all we do is sit around in silence, doing nothing. If we are praying we are doing more than something. We are in contact with the God of the universe and our holy Father. Prayer is connecting with God and then doing what God wants us to do. We are serving as well as receiving instructions to

³ Cf. Luke 2:29-32.

serve while praying. We are making things happen as well as watching them happen while we pray.

Anna and Simeon never let anything keep them from their goals. They never let the worries or boredom or that-other-thing-they-could-be-doing to distract them from their prize. They waited, and they prayed, and it all paid off. The main characters finally arrive at the right time to the Temple, and after Jesus is purified he is overwhelmed by two strangers who has curiously been waiting for him.

What do we do while we wait? Usually we are waiting for an answer to some prayer, which usually doesn't come to us all at once. So we have to wait.

What if God's promises aren't fulfilled when we expect them to be? Do we give up the waiting? Some have done that. They aren't willing to wait for God to accomplish his perfect plans through them, so they get frustrated. Others just call God names and believe God is good for nothing. They go on to do their own thing, and then they get into worse trouble, and they end up praying and waiting on God once more. So what do we do while we wait?

We need to become people who know how to wait and pray. We need to learn an attitude of waiting and praying, so that when we have to wait we are not caught off-guard. People who wait and pray, first,

know how to be silent. Silence is key, since silence pushes aside all the distractions and causes us to focus more intently on God.

Americans have a problem with silence, or at least many people around me seem to have a problem with silence. Every space of our homes, our workplaces, and our favorite stores must have some sort of music booming out of the speakers. Where I go to exercise, every corner of the building must have some noise emanating. Even in the bathroom, in the shower, and in the sauna people must have noise ringing in their ears and disrupting the atmosphere around them.

Turn off the music. Take off the headphones. Remain in silence. Turn off the radio in the car once in awhile. Sit quietly in bed or in a chair at home every so often. You may laugh, but one of the most private places in the home is in the bathroom. Nobody wants to bother you there, so visiting the bathroom is a great place for silence.

Do not bring the iPhone or iPod with you while walking on occasion. Sometimes I like to keep my headphones in my ears and not listen to anything, in order to communicate with God. I have learned much about myself and God during those times. Create moments for silence – train ourselves to be comfortable with silence. The reason why we always want to fill the space with noise might be because we fear silence.

We may actually have to listen to God. We may actually have to accomplish that which God is calling us to do.

And as we wait and pray in silence, we may also wait and pray while being loud and active. What did John Waller say in his contemporary Christian song? While I'm waiting, I will serve, I will worship, I will run the race. Do some spiritual things to the glory of God. Help the sick, feed the hungry, give aid to the weak, listen to the disheartened, tithe your money, use your time for God, express your talents... In other words, be active while waiting and praying.

Sometimes we need to test what God is possibly revealing to us. "Test" might not be the right word, but sometimes we hear something from God, which might be exactly what we are waiting for, and we just have to do it and see what happens. For example, when my family and I discovered that the Henry County School board was going to move our kids from the Union Grove School district to the Eagle's Landing School, we had to wait and pray. We had to wait, because the School Board wasn't going to vote until two months after announcing their proposal; but we didn't sit back and just do nothing. We prayed and acted on what we thought God wanted us to do while waiting. We met with other parents of our

neighborhood, and discussed plans for convincing the school board not to switch our youth from one school to another. We sent emails to people who might be affected by the changes, and we emailed the school board members of our concerns.

My family and I prayed with God for education options. We came up with several and checked them out, and planned out when we would have to act on them. Last December, the Henry County School Board decided not to switch our youth to another school, but my family and I are still praying and waiting. Maybe we should continue to explore other schooling options. Maybe it would be best for our daughter to attend another private school, rather than Union Grove. Who knows? We don't sense we should go that direction now, but we are still praying and waiting for God to show us the way.

Be active while waiting and praying. Silently explore the options that you think God is calling you to explore. If they don't work, then you know God isn't calling you that way. The idea is to understand what God wills and promises, and that might take some time to completely understand.

Simeon lifts Jesus in his arms and expounds on how he will bring truth to Israel and the Gentiles. He was told that in his lifetime he would see the

Consolation of Israel, and he never doubted it. Anna bows before the Child, and instantly starts preaching to others about what he will do. She received the same guarantee of God's promises.

Their examples prove to us that it is worth the waiting and praying, when it comes to God. The rewards are magnificent, and the blessings overwhelming. If certain promises come our way, we thank God for them and look forward to the next thing God reveals. If certain promises don't come our way, we don't lose hope. We are stronger people through the process of waiting and praying. We are more appreciative, more content, because we believe the promises will come somehow, someday.