



Expecting Jesus...
Like Simeon and Anna
Luke 2:25-38

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December 16, 2007

Waiting and anticipating are major themes of the Bible and the Christian faith. Think about all the stories in scripture that concern couples who wait for children. Forty days or forty years in the wilderness are all stories about waiting. Over and over again, biblical characters wait on and wait in the Lord.

Scripture

Luke 2:25-38

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, 28Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 29'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 30for my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed 35so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage,³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Sermon

This morning I want to talk about Barbeque. By that word I do not mean the grilling of hamburgers over direct flame. You can call that grilling or cooking out, but my friends, it is not barbeque.

Real barbeque never sees or is touched by flame. Real barbeque is cooked by indirect heat, combined with smoke. Barbeque takes time. It is, by definition, food cooked “low and slow.” Usually a side box is filled with either water soaked wood or briquettes and the heat from that source moves over the main grill. Hence, “indirect heat.” The temperature at which barbeque is cooked is generally between 225 and 250 degrees. This means that barbequing a pork shoulder (a meat and a process that give evidence that God is good) will take between 10 and 15 hours.

Now I suppose that you could throw a pork shoulder on a grill and cook it that way but the meat you get would be chewy and fatty and probably burnt on the outside and raw in the middle. But if you take the time to slow smoke your pork shoulder, allowing the smoke to flavor the meat, and for the meat to have the time to baste in its own fat (this ain't diet food), you will have some of the most tender, flavorful food you will ever eat.

The truth is most of the best things in life do take time. They take time because there is a process to them – good relationships take time, for example. And they take time because the amount of time creates anticipation for what is to come and appreciation for what you get when it finally does arrive. I know that the times that I have done an all night barbeque of pork shoulder that the smells and the smoke create a wonderful sense of anticipation, which when eating what we have cooked, meets with great appreciation.

Waiting and anticipating are major themes of the Bible and the Christian faith. Think about all the stories in scripture that concern couples who wait for children (like the Trefrys). Forty days or forty years in the wilderness are all stories about waiting. One of the most frequent phrases

in the Old Testament is “How long, O Lord?” which points to prayerful waiting for God to reveal himself. Over and over again, biblical characters wait on and wait in the Lord.

No one in scripture, and probably none of us, enjoy waiting or seek delay. We know Israelites were frustrated in wandering in the desert for all those years. We know that Abraham and Sarah had a hard time figuring out why God took so much time before he allowed Sarah to get pregnant with Isaac. “How long, O Lord?” isn’t just a conversation starter between us and God, it is a lament, a crying out for God to come to our rescue.

But God has a purpose in having us wait. I believe that part of God’s plan in the time he gives us to wait is so that we grow in that waiting time. Exile and wilderness, waiting and anticipation, are almost always times of self-examination and times of purifying our souls. We are weaned of our excesses and become stronger.

Even more times of spiritual waiting teach us to trust. And the object of that trust is God. Our independence is stripped away by time and we learn the dependency of waiting on God. Listening for his voice makes us hungry when we do hear it.

Part of the spiritual truth of waiting is learning to believe that God is in charge, or to use the theological expression, that God is “sovereign.” The consistent story of the scriptures is that all history is moving toward God’s ultimate purpose of redemption. That inexorable movement takes time and the time it takes allows us to grow even more dependent on God. Followers of Christ believe what Paul affirms in Philippians, “I am confident of this that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Christ Jesus.” Christians trust that all of history is leading to God’s sovereign reign; the incarnation and the crucifixion–resurrection of Jesus are the evidence of what is to come on that day of Christ Jesus. Alongside Christians throughout history we wait then; waiting for the Son of God to bring everything to right conclusion.

Simeon and Anna have waited. They have waited for the evidence that God would fulfill what he promised, what Luke calls “the consolation of Israel,” the day where God’s promise to redeem his chosen people happens with the arrival of the Messiah.

Notice this morning, where these two venerated elders are waiting: they are waiting at the temple. They are waiting for God in God’s House. They are worshipping, attending themselves to the presence of God, while standing alongside brothers and sisters in the faith. Waiting for the Lord happens best when we are waiting in worship. Worship is that place where the noise

of the rest of our lives is silenced, and the voice of God can be heard. Worship is that place that strips away that which is less important and puts us in the presence of that which is most important, the very God of very Gods.

I suspect that there are a number of Simeons and Annas out in the congregation this morning. Many of you have waited for much of your life for the Lord to fulfill his promise to you. You have worshipped while you wait. You have grown in your trust in God just as you have anticipated the Lord's fulfillment of his promises. And those of us who stand beside you can and should learn much from you about faithful waiting, and the higher purpose of worshiping in God's house.

How joyous and wonderful then for Simeon and Anna when Jesus, the fulfillment of their patient, worshipful waiting, meets them in worship. Jesus is the coming of God; God revealed to us in an unveiling of his purpose and his love. Having waited worshipfully for Jesus, they recognize him when they see him. And their joy is made complete.

More than just joy to impart, Simeon and Anna have wisdom to impart. Waiting in worship has made them wise. Anna transforms from prophet to evangelist, proclaiming the presence of Christ to all the others assembled.

Simeon thanks and praises God, telling God that with the coming of Jesus he has been emancipated, he is now a servant / slave who has been dismissed in peace. Simeon also prophesizes that Jesus is coming for the redemption of Israel and that he is also a light of revelation to the Gentiles. It is Simeon who first tells us gentiles that we are included in God's master plan of redemption.

Wise Simeon speaks also to Joseph and Mary. He tells Mary that Jesus will bring the rise and fall of many, and "a sword will pierce your own soul too." Fred Craddock, commenting on this passage, says that here, Luke "weaves a dark thread into this tapestry of hope." Wise, waiting servants of the Lord know that walking with God brings pain and sacrifice as a minor note in the overall melody of faith.

Some of you have waited long for the Lord before he fulfilled his purpose and his promise in your life. Some of you are still waiting. God is faithful. Let your time of waiting be in worship, trust in the Lord, know that all things are working toward his good plan, that all will be completed in the day of Christ Jesus.