

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from the one born to be the salvation of the world, Jesus Christ, the Messiah and our Lord, amen.

I don't have a lot of patience. I'm working on it. Actually, I should say God is working on me with regard to being more patient. I confess to you that I frequently resist God in this area. In my arrogance, I occasionally think I know best and because my way is clearly superior, it's hard for me to wait for God or for other people to see things my way. When I felt the call to ordained ministry I was stationed in Alaska and had 8 more years to serve before I could retire and pursue my vision. I had made the commitment to the Air Force, to my family, and to myself that I would serve until I was eligible to retire. I didn't think God would ask me to break those commitments, so I had to wait 8 years, serving in a vocation I no longer felt called to nor satisfied with. Those were the longest 8 years of my life. I knew what God was calling me to do, but more importantly, God was affirming my call through my family, through my then current Pastor at our Church in Alaska, and even from several of my past pastors. As time passed and we moved back to Ohio, I continued to receive positive encouragement from our new church in Fairborn, from both pastors and from the church council at that church. As I entered the candidacy process, I was indorsed by the committee and by the seminary. This was a long, drawn out process with many ups and downs. I already told you how much I dislike waiting, so you can imagine how frustrated I

was for 8 long years. Time crawls so slowly when you're waiting, especially when what you're waiting for is really important.

Our Gospel this morning is called The Presentation of Our Lord. Luke tells us Mary and Joseph had to wait until the time had come for their purification to bring Jesus to the Temple for dedication where Jesus was set apart as Holy through the sacrifice of 2 turtle doves. According to the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph had to wait 11 days after the birth of their baby before they could be considered ritually clean. So, 11 days after Christmas Mary and Joseph made their first trip to Jerusalem after the birth of Jesus. The Law also stipulates that all firstborn sons would be dedicated and made Holy by sacrifice 40 days after their birth. If you count the days from Christmas to today, guess what, it's exactly 40 days. That's why today we talk about this trip to Jerusalem to present Jesus at the temple.

At this point Simeon enters the story. Aside from what we're told in Luke 2, we know nothing about him. We don't know his background, his hometown, his education, or even his occupation. We assume he was a priest—although the text doesn't say so. We also assume he was an old man—but even that is not a certain fact. He simply appears on the stage of history as a bit player in the drama surrounding the birth of Christ. After his part is over, he fades from the scene, never to be heard from again. We know was Simeon was waiting for the Messiah to come. He was a Spirit-filled man, eagerly awaiting the imminent appearance of

the Messiah. That last part is fascinating. The Holy Spirit had told him, “You will not die before you see the Messiah.” Each day Simeon would be at the Temple. I imagine him wondering how he would know the Messiah. What should he look for? Did he know to look for a baby? Or was he looking for a teenager or a strong young man or, God forbid, a woman? No one knows the answer to those questions. What we do know is, day by day he kept watch over the many people coming to the Temple. Each time a young couple came in with a baby, he thought to himself, “Is this the one?” My guess, he’d been waiting in the temple for many years. By the time Jesus arrived he was maybe was 70 or 80 years old. I imagine him with a long gray beard, stooped shoulders, a wrinkled face, bushy eyebrows, and trembling hands. If so, then he knows it can’t be long. The Savior of Israel must be coming at any moment. Then 40 days after that first Christmas, along comes Mary holding the baby in her arms with Joseph by her side. Never was there a more unlikely couple. He was a poor carpenter from Nazareth and she a peasant girl carrying a little baby boy. They were obviously from the country. They obviously didn’t have much money. If they were rich, they would have brought a sheep, goat, or a bull ox to sacrifice. They only had enough money to purchase 2 turtle doves, the minimum required by the Law. If you were people-watching, you wouldn’t give them a second glance. Yet, here they are in cosmopolitan Jerusalem, timidly walking onto the Temple courts. When Simeon

sees them, he asks his question for the 10,000th time, “Is this the one?” To his surprise the Holy Spirit says, “Yes.”

Suddenly Simeon’s heart leaps within him. The long days of waiting are finally over. The Lord’s Christ is before him. Here is the One for whom the nation has been waiting. He walks over, introduces himself, and says, “Do you mind if I hold your child?” As Mary gives the infant Jesus to Simeon, the thought hits him, “I am holding the salvation of the world in my arms.” Simeon calls him “...a light for revelation to the Gentiles,” and “the glory of Israel.” In this baby, Simeon sees the fulfillment of all the hopes and dreams of the Jewish people across the centuries. To call Jesus both a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel takes us back a thousand years earlier, to the time of Abraham when the Lord said, “I will make your name great, and make of you a great nation, and through you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” God told Abraham he would be blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations. Abraham, his son Isaac, and grandson Jacob all received the promise of God and waited their whole lives. They died waiting. Simeon also had a promise, that he would see the Messiah before he died. Luke doesn’t say if Anna had that same promise, but it’s safe to say she was convinced she would also meet God’s Messiah.

Waiting is hard for most people. Now-a-days we don’t wait for much. Many people are more likely to purchase something on credit rather than saving up

for the purchase. Cars are offered with zero money down and 72 months to pay it off. We've been described as 'People of the instant now.' When we want something, we get it. This lifestyle doesn't work in a life of faith.

Simeon and Anna offer us a way to wait without growing impatient and frustrated to the point of giving up. Here's what I mean... Simeon was devout and righteous. His righteousness refers to his relationship with God and with the people around him. Simeon was in a right relationship with them. He was also devout. This means he was active in worship and sacrifice, prayer and study. The highlights of Anna's life were also worship, prayer and fasting. She never left the Temple and she prayed, fasted, and worshipped continually. The practice of using the Spiritual Disciplines were an important part of the lives of these two people.

When it comes to our faith waiting doesn't mean we sit back and twiddle our thumbs. As parents or grandparents of faith, we pray and actively wait for our children to grow up to be people of faith who generously share God's love and grace. While we wait for God's kingdom, we use our talents and abilities to serve others and meet their needs. We wait with expectation by participating in fellowship opportunities and small groups where we can encourage each other in our faith. We worship regularly. We pray often and we live our lives as living examples to the people around us.

Simeon and Anna were waiting for the Messiah's first appearance. Today we wait for the second coming of Jesus. It seems like he's been delayed or put on pause indefinitely. It's been so long many have given up waiting. That almost happened to me many times during those 8 long years when I was waiting to start my ministry. I kept thinking I wasn't good enough to serve God in this way. I worried almost constantly about money. How were we going to afford my seminary education at the same time college educations for both Trevor and Niki. Every time I waivered God sent a messenger to encourage and support me. Somehow, by the grace of God, I made it through those 8 years. As God's people, we've been waiting to Jesus to come back for 2000 years! I don't know what your prayer practices are, but I'll tell you I often pray to see him return.

When I talk to people about prayer, I always say God answers every prayer. Sometimes he answers with a resounding YES! Other times, like our earthly parents, God says no to our request. I'm convinced God's favorite answer to prayers is the third option, wait. If it be God's will, may you see his salvation in your lifetime. May you be moved to improve your relationship with God through the example of Simeon and Anna. While you wait for Jesus to return, may God give you a purpose and opportunities to serve him by serving your neighbors. May we all continue to rely on God's promise to Abraham and every God lover since, that we will be blessed in order to be a blessing to all people. Amen.