

## Worth the Wait

Sterling UMC  
November 28, 2010  
Luke 2:21-32

Don't you just hate to wait? I do. Patience is not something that I am exceptionally good at and as a matter of fact is one of the main areas in my life that God is having to work overtime to bring into line with His will and plan for my life. Christmas is the worst when it comes to waiting. Some of us are as fidgety as a five year old at a doctors office at this time of year. Someone said that "good things" come to those that wait? Do they really? Sometimes I wonder!

I don't think that I am alone in my impatience. There's the guy who was grumbling and grouching in front of me in the line at the grocery store early this week. And, the lady who honked at me and said hello in a rather strange way when I slowed to turn into the mall parking lot the other day. And of course we cannot forget those that have to jump in front of us in line at the store in order to stand there as the clerk has to do a price check on one of the items in their cart. I am sure that in some way you are a lot like me and just hate to wait, you don't care to stand in line, or desire to sit in a "waiting" room, or wasting time standing around and simply hanging out.

And waiting is particularly hard for us as in this day and age, because our culture teaches us not to wait. Think about it. We live in a micro-waving, Fed-Exing, fast-food-eating, high-speed internet society. We don't like to wait for anything or anyone.

The truth is all of us have experienced difficult WAITING times in one form or other. Perhaps this is what inspired Lewis Smeades to write:

"Waiting is our destiny. As creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for, we wait in the darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending we cannot write. We wait for a 'not yet' that feels like a 'not ever.' Waiting is the hardest work of hope."

Well, how can we impatient human beings learn to wait? I mean, what do we need to do in order to somehow discipline ourselves to wait? This is where a study of our Scripture lesson for the morning comes in —because in it we meet a man who was obviously very good at waiting. His name is SIMEON and Luke's gospel tells us that he was a very old man who had been waiting all his life for the Messiah to come.

And Simeon was not alone—because there were several people like him in his day who were watching and waiting for God to fulfill His promise. They were referred to as, "The Quiet in the Land" and they believed in living a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until God should send His Messiah. All their lives they waited quietly and patiently for God.

Simeon had probably been to the temple hundreds of times without finding his hopes fulfilled. I can picture other people coming up to Simeon and saying to him, "Give it up, old man. You're never going to see any messiah in your lifetime. You are a hopeless fool. Forget your dream."

There probably were times when Simeon did feel like giving up on his hopes -- when he felt that God's promise was nothing but the whistling of wind in the trees. However, Simeon clung to that hope. And therein he teaches us something about the nature of faith. At those times when he felt like throwing in the towel on his dream, when he felt like he was at the end of his rope, he tied a knot and hung on, even though the rest of the world called him a dreamer and a fool. Simeon kept his vision.

And finally one day it happened! As Simeon squinted through his cataract-covered eyes he saw that the Light of the World had indeed come! He saw Him Who he had been waiting and watching for all his life! In the face of the tiny baby he saw what he had been waiting for and hoping for all these years. And Simeon took the child in his arms and praised God saying—[or rather, SINGING]:

"Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

He saw the Christ child, the long awaited promise of God fulfilled, the salvation of God's people made possible in the life of this tiny child. And it was worth the wait.

Why was it worth the wait?

It was worth the wait because in the coming of the Christ child we have the hope of new life because now we know what God is like. The coming of Christ gave us a living picture of who God is. The Bible says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible." This is what we mean by the incarnation — God came to earth wrapped in a human body. The God of heaven came to live among us that we might know what he is truly like.

Imagine what the world would be like if God, in the person of Jesus Christ, had never come to earth. We would have half a Bible. We would not have heard of the love of a personal God. God would never have visited the world and we would have no hope of his returning to the earth.

Without Jesus, Mary Magdalene would have died in her sin. Matthew would still have been a traitor to his countrymen. The Roman soldier would have continued his cruelty. Peter, James and John would have done nothing more with their lives than fish for a living. The Apostle Paul would never have been more than a cruel Pharisee steeped in legalism with an unrelenting demand for perfection from other people. The people who needed healing would still have been broken in body and spirit. The lame would still

have been lame; the blind would have remained in their darkness; the deaf would have still lived in silence. We would never have heard the words: "Peace I leave with you; Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." or "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." And "I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly."

This is why it was worth the wait, because we have a God who cared enough to come. He showed us what he was like and his name was love. He was the friend of sinners and failures. He showed love and compassion to the outcasts of the world. He healed the sick and raised the dead. If Jesus had not come we would never have known that about God.

Why was it worth the wait? Because in His coming we now have the hope of the forgiveness of sins. Think for a moment of the worst thing you have ever done — the thing that makes your heart burn with shame. And then think of what it would be like if Jesus had not come and you could not be forgiven for your sin. What would that be like? Your guilt would never be relieved, and condemnation would always be hanging over your head. But since Jesus came, forgiveness has come to those of us who have received the grace that Christ came to offer. We can forgive ourselves and others because we have experienced the liberating forgiveness that Jesus Christ came to give us.

But if Jesus had never come, we would be missing a Savior. There would be no talk of forgiveness and reconciliation to God, only laws to be obeyed. Grace would not be a word in our vocabulary. We would talk about justice, and people getting what they deserved, rather than finding mercy with God. If Jesus had never come, the woman caught in adultery would never have heard the words: "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." We would not have the hope of the promise which says, "If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation, the old is gone, behold all things become new."

Why was it worth the wait? Well because Jesus came we have the hope of heaven. Heaven was made possible by Jesus. Think about what the world would feel like if there were no hope of heaven. What would you say at the funeral of a loved one if Jesus had not come? There would be no hope beyond the grave. You could not talk about heaven, or any reason to hope for eternal life with God.

If Jesus Christ had not come, there would be no hope of hearing the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" There would not be any hope of a resurrection — not even the concept of one. There would be no eternal life. Nothing to anticipate, except the closing of the casket lid and the coldness of the grave. But because Jesus came, all that has changed. We live in joyful anticipation of what is yet to come.

When I was young sometimes did some snooping at Christmas time, trying to find my gift and figure out what was in the wrapped packages which my Mom hid. One year I discovered a large package with my name on it that I knew was a set of golf clubs. One shake of that box revealed the unmistakable sound of clubs. When Mom wasn't around, I would go and feel the package, shake it, and pretend that I was on the golf course. The point is, I was already enjoying the pleasures of a future event; namely, the unwrapping. It had my name on it. I knew what it was. It was mine, but it would not be handed over to me until Christmas morning. Then I would see with my eyes what before I had only seen with my heart. And it was worth the wait!

Advent means that Christ has given us the gift of heaven. At this point it is still wrapped. But the package has our name on it. We know what awaits us. It is ours. We would never have received the gift if it were not for Christmas. But we wait longingly for the day when we will enjoy the gift of heaven in all of its unwrapped wonder. And it will be worth the wait.

That is what Advent and Christmas is all about. This why we celebrate it each and every year. You see, Jesus' coming—His birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection—it gives us a sure hope that some day our time of waiting will end. We know that when we ask Him, He forgives us of our sin and gives us the promise of eternal life in Heaven with Him, so in the back of our minds is this glorious understanding that this life with all its painful times of waiting will eventually end. We can say with the apostle Paul,

“I know WHOM I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him AGAINST THAT DAY.” (2 Timothy 1:12)

So as a Christian—as someone who has put his faith in Jesus—I can endure physical and emotional pain because I know someday there will be no more pain. I can endure times when I am treated unfairly because I know someday every wrong will be righted. I can get through times of being separated from those I love because I know that one day we will all be together. I can wait through times of deep grief because I know someday I will join my loved ones who have died...those who have put their faith in Jesus...in Heaven.

Simeon recognized this. He understood this. That day in the temple courts he took that little baby Jesus and held Him in his hands and saw in Him the hope of humanity's eternal salvation. In fact his brief impromptu chorus celebrates one wonderful truth: **GOD'S SALVATION HAS FINALLY COME!!!** And it was worth the wait!

The good news this morning is we don't have to wait like Simeon to accept this gracious gift from God. Advent reminds that Christ has come. And he is here this morning ready to offer to us the hope of new life, the hope of forgiveness of sins, and the hope of heaven. God's salvation has finally come in the person of Jesus Christ. All we have to do is receive him into our hearts and lives. And so I ask you today, what are you waiting for?