

Here's a question to begin with - I wonder what you are like with waiting for things? Are you like me in supermarkets, where you look at a checkout queue, and if the queue next door is moving quicker then you move over hoping that you can get out. Or are you patient enough to be able to just stand and wait. I find it really difficult to wait on things – what about you? A report from a few years ago said that on average, we spend six months of our lives sitting at traffic lights - and over 5 years waiting in queues. Five years of my life—waiting in queues!

Here today in our Gospel reading are two people who exemplified patience – they knew the importance of waiting. We don't actually know much about Simeon or Anna, but we do know they had one thing in common – they were waiting for the coming of the messiah and for the redemption of Israel. We're going to focus on Simeon today, but for both of them can you just imagine the scene as they sit within the temple – the place of worship, day after day, knowing that something is going to happen, but with no real idea of when.

Being patient for something that is more precious than anything this world can offer is something truly worth waiting for isn't it, and therefore this familiar story can teach all of us what it means to wait on God, because if we are honest this morning, in different ways we are all impatient with God at different stages of our lives. So the first thing we need to ask ourselves is this, in the decisions of life, are we willing to wait on God's perfect timing?

So often we fight against the process of waiting. It is not natural to us – but that doesn't mean it is not good. There are also times when waiting can seem very painful. I can remember during my first year as a minister being with a gentleman who was in Intensive Care for I think 130 days fighting for his life, and then in the end he didn't make it. Can you imagine the impact of that type of waiting can have on a family? And yet through his illness I had the privilege of being with him when he gave his life to God. At times waiting may not make any sense, and yet in this example even in the pain, the waiting brought a greater eternal reward.

In our waiting, if we change our perspective a bit, we can begin to see it as a gift from God instead of a burden. Both Isaiah and the Psalms are littered with references to how waiting can strengthen our faith. Those who wait for God experience His salvation in times of trouble (Is. 33:2). Waiting on God renews our strength so that we can "soar on wings like eagles" (Is. 40:31). Obedient waiting is the pathway to inheriting God's blessings (Ps. 37:34). Waiting is intimately linked with answered prayer (Ps. 38:15, Mic. 7:7).

And therefore the challenge in our human nature is to have faith in God's timing, and not our own impatience.

One other way of looking at it is this, can you imagine not waiting on God, going ahead on your own strength, and then wishing later that you had waited. Today each of us may be waiting on God for something – it may be clarity to something, it might be direction, or it might simply be being still before him so we can hear him. But are we prepared to trust in the God who created not only the Universe but the order of it all. Are you prepared to wait for the good things that God has for you? Simeon was, and he wasn't disappointed.

I think this now leads us on to a second consideration, which is this - who controls your life?

Groucho Marx said this about men, “Man does not control his own fate. The women in his life do that for him”. But seriously though, who is in control of your decisions? And I’m quite a black & white person when it comes to this. Because really, either you take control of your own destiny, or you hand everything over to God. I know there are areas of my life that I still keep control of, but my desire is actually that I give everything over to God.

I think you can answer this quite easily based upon what you see in people. Anna never departed from the temple, her life was focused on worship with fasting and prayer night and day. Her lifestyle displayed much about what she considered as important. As for Simeon, we read that the Holy Spirit was on him. And in vs 26 it had been revealed to him by God’s Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And as he was moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. The control and direction on Simeon’s life came from a power far greater than a religious practice. It came through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in his life. And he was communicating with the Holy Spirit and he was responding to the Spirit’s instructions.

Can you imagine what Simeon might have missed if he hadn’t listened to the Holy Spirit’s prompting? ... If he hadn’t followed the Holy Spirit’s prompting that day, he would have missed that God arranged appointment in the temple. He would have missed that thing that God had promised him – a chance to see the Saviour of the world in the flesh. I wonder what we are potentially missing out on because we are not letting God control our lives?

I suppose the final question that our patient waiting makes us consider is this. Do we understand the revelation of God that such waiting can bring into our lives and situations we face?

What was it that Simeon was waiting for? He was waiting for the consolation of Israel. It’s worth actually looking a bit closer at that word consolation, because it comes from the greek word Paraklesis, and it’s a word meaning comfort – that Simeon was waiting for the comfort of Israel. But if you unpack that word a little bit more you discover that paraklesis was understood as someone physically coming, being called, to closely walk alongside and provide comfort. And therefore Simeon, like many others, had an eager anticipation building that God would provide someone to bring Israel out of bondage from the Roman occupation. That a messiah would literally save them, and Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he wouldn’t die until he saw this Messiah in the flesh.

Can you picture the scene in the temple that day - can you imagine the surprise of Mary and Joseph as this old stranger approached, looking, not at them, but at the child. He gently reached for and then cradled the baby in his arms. Through Simeon’s faithful patience and his obedience to the Spirit’s direction, God now had opened his eyes and Simeon saw before him, not the 40-day-old child, but the 33 year old man hanging from a cross. He knew that he held in his old, tired arms, the Saviour of the world.

It therefore assures me and encourages me that if we are patient and wait before God for his direction, I truly believe that the revelation and promise that he will give us in whatever need we have, either personally, or as a parish, is going to be far more than we can ever consider. You see when we stop pursuing our own dreams or our own wishes, when we truly let God be in control of our futures, then we truly see the hope that can only come through the salvation in Christ.

When God had fulfilled his promise to Simeon, Simeon could rest, contented that God was and is always faithful. Whatever we wait for in our own lives, be assured that He is Faithful, He is in control, and as the Psalmist says to be strong, take courage, and wait on him. Amen.