

Can I ask you a question?

What are you waiting for?

It seems a simple enough question. As you look down the path of your future, what are you waiting for? Whether we think about it consciously day by day or not, most of us are waiting for something in our lives. We're waiting for school to be done. We're waiting for the next holiday. We're waiting for the next vacation. We're waiting for our debt to be paid off, to meet that special someone. We're waiting for our health to finally be as good as it used to be. Waiting for things to get better for us so we don't have to struggle so much through life. We're waiting...sometimes not so patiently. And then what? Why are we waiting for these things? Do you ever stop to ask yourself that? Once the car's paid off, then I'll be happy. Once I can retire, then I'll be at peace. Once I've met that special someone, then I'll be content. We're waiting for these things to happen so that maybe then we'll finally feel complete.

Simeon was waiting. We read about him in Luke chapter 2: <Read Text Luke 2:25-35>

We don't know how old Simeon was at this time, but we can easily imagine that he was not a young man. He was old enough that God had to specifically promise him that he would live to see the Christ. We don't know how old he was when he received that promise either. How many years, or even decades did he have to wait after God told him that? But the truth is he was waiting even before that promise. As a man righteous and devout, as a true son of Israel, he knew the promises of God to send a savior, to send the Messiah that would save Israel from its sins. Israel had been waiting for that before it was even called Israel. Before David slew Goliath, before Moses led them out of Egypt, before the days of Noah, from the time of the very first sin, God had promised a savior that would crush the serpent's head. For thousands of years, the entire world had been waiting for the savior, the one who would deliver them from the sin they inherited, stemming all the way back to their first father Adam. That sin that kept them at arm's length from their God. That sin that divided God from his people.

I don't know if we can even identify with that. I know I, personally, don't think I can identify with that. I have a hard time waiting five minutes for dinner to be microwaved, I don't think I can really comprehend what it must be like for a people to be waiting thousands of years for their savior. I don't even know if I can understand what it was like for Simeon in the years he probably had to wait. And I can only imagine his reaction when it was revealed to him that *he* would get to see the Christ in person. The messiah that his people had been waiting all that time for...it was all going to start during *his* lifetime.

And then, who knows how many years later, Simeon is in the temple courts, being moved by the Holy Spirit to be there. He sees the parents, Mary and Joseph, and by the power of the God he knows. He knows that the baby they carry is the Christ, the child who would grow and save all of humanity from their sins. *This* was it. *This* was all he had been waiting for. We do not have to imagine how he felt, the words of his song say it all. To use the phrasing as we sing it after each time we've taken the Lord's Supper, **"Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all people."**

Simeon had been waiting for something. He had been waiting to see the salvation of mankind. And now that he had seen it, he was happy. He was content. He was at peace. This child, Jesus, was in fact, all he needed. He was ready to depart, he was ready to die and be with his God forever. There wasn't just one more thing, one more want to fill that space. This was it. He was complete, knowing that Jesus lived, that his salvation was assured.

So I ask you again...what are you waiting for? Why do look to the future, to the horizon for things that will make us happy, for people and places that will make us content? Because we ought to know from experience that they won't. Oh they may in the short-term, but the sparkle of every new toy fades quicker than we think and then there's always something new to wait for, something else we want before we can *really* be happy. We keep looking ahead for what's going to make us content. Why do we look in the wrong direction for peace?

Look the other way. True peace, real peace...is behind you. Look back to Christmas. Look all the way back to the first Christmas. What Simeon was waiting for was not just for him but for every person of all time. Jesus, God made man, is true peace. All the things that cause us disquiet, discomfort, anxiety and pain in this world are taken care of by Jesus. The loneliness, the struggles, the sickness, the poverty, all the problems that the world dumps on us are a result of sin. All the things that take peace away from our lives are caused by sin. And the big problem...that one that we spend so much of our life trying to not think about and then trying to avoid and escape...the big problem that we are each going to die someday...that too is caused by sin...and cured by Jesus.

Why does death bother us? The world will tell us that it is the natural order of things. People live and people die, it's the cycle of life. But that is not true. Death is a most *unnatural* thing. It is not the way God intended and created this world. Death, like everything else that troubles us, is a result of sin entering our world. And it is therefore a constant reminder of how deeply we have offended our God every day of our lives. And we do. The very fact that we are constantly waiting for something else to make us happy, that alone insults our God. He has seen fit to give us our daily bread. It may not be luxurious but it is more than we deserve and it is certainly as much as we need. And yet we grumble. We complain. We begrudge our Lord for not making life easier on us. For putting us in situations we're not happy with. For not giving us everything we want. For making us put up with difficult people and situations. We hold it against our Father that he would ever do such things to us. That disquiet and lack of contentment is a foul odor in the nose of God and we know it. Death is a constant reminder to us of these and our countless other sins. We...each and every one of us...have offended God. Defied his law. Scorned his gifts. Despised his word. We know that death is exactly what we deserve, and that thought robs us of any lasting peace we could have in this life.

...If it were not for Jesus. As I said, Jesus is the answer to all of our disquiet in this life. Without Jesus, there is no peace for us. With Jesus, there is nothing but peace. That which Simeon was waiting for is all we need, same as him. That little baby boy that Simeon took in his arms grew up. He lived a life like no other human ever had. Because he was born without an inherited sinful nature like us, he was able to live a life without sin, something no other human has ever been capable of. And then he did something we could never have expected. After he had lived a life that was 100% pleasing to God. After being the *only* human *ever* to *earn* eternal life, he turned around and gave it to us. As God, his perfect life has infinite value. That value is given to us. Where before we were stained and filthy before our God, now we are covered with the life that Christ lived. A white robe, white like none of us have ever known, completely covers all our faults. A robe of righteousness that hides who we really are and shows us to God the Father the way his Son lived instead. Our debt has been paid, his credit has been given to us. And being God, his credit cannot be spent up no matter how much we fall into sin. Because of his suffering and because of his sacrifice, we are at peace with God.

So where does that leave us? We're no different than Simeon. We no longer have any reason to fear death. All the problems we have in this life are, relatively speaking, minor problems. They will all pass, they will all fade. Though it seems like a long time of suffering here, our lives are just a blink of an eye compared to eternity. Knowing – for *sure* – that Jesus has paid the price for all our selfishness and for all our grumbling puts a completely different perspective on our trials in this life and more importantly, on our impending death. The trials cannot harm us permanently...we know that now. Our life will continue in perfect bliss long after this world has passed away. And when we do die, we know that we are not leaving a world worth clinging to, but passing on to something infinitely better.

We have seen Jesus, we gave witness to his birth just a few days ago. We have the peace that Simeon knew at seeing his savior in the flesh. We, like him, are ready to depart in peace and leave this world now.

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...so... what *are* we waiting for?

We're at peace with God and our eventual death...why don't we all get to just go now? Simeon was released after he saw Jesus. How come we have to stick around? Heaven sounds a whole lot better than what we've got going on here.

Because God still has work for us to do. There are others - many, many others – who do not know the peace of Jesus. Who go through life fearing death because they do not know what's going to happen to them. And God has chosen us, the people who are already at peace, to do that work of spreading the good news. We know firsthand the stresses this world piles on us when we forget our Savior. We know the deep comforting reassurance of peace that comes to us when we remember all he has done for us. We naturally will want to share that feeling with others. How much, and for how long...we don't know. Our work could be done tomorrow, it could be another 50 years. It doesn't matter if you're five or fifty...when God decides you're done, you're done. But that doesn't matter, does it? We are ready to depart in peace. For our eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord.

So what are you waiting for? Go out now, and share that peace with the world.

Amen.