

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Let me begin by asking you a question: with the dawn of each new day, how do you greet the morning? Are you the type of person who wakes before the alarm, jumps out of bed, throws open the curtains and says, “GOOD MORNING, NEW DAY!”

Or are you the type that hears the alarm, gives it a left hook, pulls the pillow tightly over your head, then rolls over and begs for just one more hour.

Or are you the type of person who rolls out of bed and does 20 push ups, just to get the blood flowing for the new day? How do you rise to greet each morning? You see, the truth is that in one way or another, we are all guided and influenced more than we know, by that little idol that sits atop the alter next to our beds. Time, it seems, has a vice grip upon our lives. In some ways, the clock is always calling the shots in your day.

The riddle that Gollum asked Bilbo in the *Hobbit*: *This thing all things devours; Birds, beasts, trees, flowers; Gnaws iron, bites steel; Grinds hard stones to meal; Slays king, ruins town, And beats mountain down.* Time.

There was a story of a pastor who was invited to go over to Africa to spend time with a church there, and while he was there, the people he was with kept noticing how he would look down at his wristwatch. One day, he saw a few of them pointing at his wrist and talking among themselves, so he asked the translator what they were talking about. They are asking what type of god it is that you can wear on your wrist. Then he said this arresting thing: the difference between you all and us is that you have so many watches, but no time, whereas we have no watches and have all the time in the world.

Today's message touches in on a serious question that we all will face in one way or another. What do you do when you have no choice but to wait? And the issue of your waiting is much more serious than a checkout line at the grocery store or the bank. What do you do when you had a dream for your gifts that has never come true? What do you do when you're single and don't want to be? What do you do when the intimacy in your marriage is gone, and you long for it? What do you do when the teenager is pushing you away? What do you do when the grown child is struggling with an addiction? What do you do when your loved one is hooked up to a machine to keep them alive? What do you do when your children move two states away and take the grandkids with them? (This one is particularly relevant to my parents, who will listen to this one online. Mom and dad, we love you.)

Waiting is an inevitable part of life. It's something we all will have to face. And the question is, will we face it the way Simeon did, with faith, and resolute trust; or will we slink into despair? Simeon teaches us how to wait.

Simeon, Luke's gospel tells us, is a man who is righteous and devout, going to the temple every day because he had heard from the Lord that he himself would see the consolation of Israel. It's not that Simeon was promised that he would hold a little baby in his arms, but that he would see Israel vindicated, see its rescue. Simeon's life is defined by this one thing, unyielding loyalty to a promise made that he would see the savior.

Now we need to do a little Greek work here. The Greek word for this looking is the word *prosdekomai*. Say that with me, *prosdekomai*. *Prosdekomai* is a combination of two words smashed together, the word *dekomai* is the word to wait and the word *pros* is the word for forward. So the translation is a little cumbersome, but you see the imagery very clearly, *prosdekomai* literally means to wait forwardly, to wait with anticipation, to be calmly expectant, to wait with a hoped for end in mind. We get a better feel for what this looks like in English when we use the phrase to look forward to something.

Max Lucado describes Simeon as being **patiently vigilant – not so patient that he loses his vigilance, and not so vigilant that he loses his patience**. It would have been all too easy for Simeon after years and years and years of waiting and years and years and years of not seeing the one to simply give up, to throw in the towel and lose his vigilance. For some of us, that might be where we are, we've been waiting for so long that we begin to doubt whether change will ever come, and so we lose our vigilance. Maybe for some of us, we need to hear that again today. Perhaps God is saying to you, don't give up on that dream just yet, don't cash in on that relationship just yet. Stay with me because I'm calling you to wait.

But it could also have been for Simeon that his hope was so high and his zeal was so intense that he wanted to see the prophesied one now, and so he could have easily lost his patience. For others of us, that's where we find ourselves, struggling to remain patient in the face of great expectations. There are some things that can't be engineered, there are some things that we cannot manufacture, there are some things we just have to wait for.

And so maybe God is saying to us today, you know...you're just going to have to trust me on this one right now. I know it's hard, but be patient, relax, I've got it under control.

Patiently vigilant – not so patient that you lose your vigilance and not so vigilant that you lose your patience. Simeon could have gotten angry and resentful towards God for the years he had to wait, but he recognized that in the wait, God was cultivating a spiritual maturity that was just as important for him as the sight of little baby Jesus.

One of our heavenly Father's prayers for us is that we will slow down long enough to take in the gifts he wants to give us. And, of course, the greatest gift is the gift of Jesus. This is what drives Simeon to get out of bed each day, put on his robes, and make his way to the temple—even when people around him scoffed saying, “Look at silly ol’ Simeon still waitin’ on a hope.” It’s the thought that *this day might be the one*, the thought that *this day I will see God’s salvation* that propels him each day. And then finally on the day when he does see the Christ child, he wraps the child in his arms and sings a hymn of praise to God, “For now O God you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

You see, it’s the vigilant hope that Simeon has that keeps him getting out of bed each morning and asking, “Is today going to be the day, Lord?”

Something happens when our patience gives way to God’s answered prayer, and it may not be something noticeable to anyone else but you. Day in and day out waiting forwardly, waiting prayerfully as Simeon did for God to work in your life for that consolation to come, there is a real possibility that when that answer comes that no one else knows it but you. But it’s there. Whether a child who says, thank you, after years of taking; a parent who peacefully passes into the arms of God; a job in which you can now go to with peace and confidence and know that you are the person for it; a spouse who has that gleam back in their eye. Simeon knew it when he saw it then he left the temple in peace. Peace to know that God has not left us, peace to know that God is still enthroned in the heavens and in our hearts, peace to know that wherever we go it is God who not only sends us, but goes with us.

Simeon’s song of praise in Luke 2 (in Latin it’s called the Nunc Dimittis) begins, ***Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people; A light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.***

We don’t know where Simeon went after his encounter with Mary and Joseph and the Christ child at the temple. His is one of a multitude of lives that, after encountering Jesus, departed with a whole new horizon.

The wonderful irony in all of this is, as I mentioned, that life around us may not immediately change, but inside you know that everything is different because the waiting is over.

You know, each Christmas Eve, we quietly and under the cover of darkness usher in the most transformative event the world has ever known. And yet to any other, December 24th (minus the trappings of the commercial holiday) is a night that doesn't look much different than any other. As we gather in candlelight singing Silent Night, Holy Night, for many the gifts have been unwrapped, food cleaned up, children to bed and things are finally quiet.

But each year as we open the doors to Hill Street and walk out on to the steps to see the surrounding world, everything is the same around us, but somehow nothing is the same. Everything appears as it was, but somehow everything is different. This is what Simeon saw, and maybe, just maybe God gave Simeon a little glimpse from Heaven's perspective.

This is how the same event is described in Revelation 12. That text says nothing about shepherds or wise men, but it depicts a dragon leading a ferocious struggle in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, wearing a crown of twelve stars cries out in pain as she gives birth. Suddenly, the enormous red dragon descends. His tail sweeps away a third of the stars, and he crouches hungrily before the woman eager to devour her child after his birth. At the last instant, the child is snatched away to safety as the woman flees into the desert. The dragon is furious and takes his anger out on the other children who remain behind. This is no ordinary holiday, this is not just your average night, not when a dragon slayer is born. Simeon and Anna looked through all the ritual of their practices and their waiting and they saw the miracle of salvation before them.

On the surface, everything was the same, but in reality nothing was, for because of this child the entirety of human existence is now eternally different. That is why Simeon was able to say, "Lord, dismiss me now with your peace."

The dragon has been slain, those things that discouraged and defeated me before, now no longer will, the Savior has been born, and that changes everything.