

Simeon Sermon: How to wait

Luke 2:22-33

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When Kelly and I were first married, we moved from Syracuse New York to Madison Wisconsin. I had gotten a job doing biochemistry research for the USDA Forest Products Laboratory. Prior to our move Kelly had spent several years caring for mildly to severely cognitively challenged adults. So, when we were looking for employment for her, we found employment with a bonus, it provided our housing!

For the first year of our time in Madison, we were house parents for two guys, full time, and one guy part time. Our two full timers were Ben, and Larry. Ben was in his early 20's, he was the one with the more severe cognitive and behavioral Challenges. He was non-verbal and communicated only through a few rudimentary signs. Ben had a fiercely loyal former foster-mom named Connie. We got along well with Connie, which we learned was both rare and fortunate.

Larry was in his 50's, was less severely challenged, was fully verbal and, most times, a lot of fun to be around. Larry, however, had one big problem. Anticipation. Larry did not do so well when he had to wait for something. If he knew Connie was coming for a visit, she could not appear quickly enough. When he was ready for work in the morning, and the bus was late, look out! One of Larry and my favorite things to do together was to watch M.A.S.H. I can still hear Larry's voice in my head saying. "Ken, MACH is on!" While Larry and I really enjoyed watching M.A.S.H. together, Kelly and I did not enjoy the result of M.A.S.H. not being on when Larry thought it should be.

Our place of employment also provided respite workers for us. This allowed Kelly and I to have every other weekend, and a regular week day, off. On those days, we took full advantage of the opportunity to get out, and be just us. One day, during the Christmas season, we had been out running errands. When we returned, we found Larry sitting on the couch in the living room, huffing and puffing, as if he had just completed a marathon. A good chunk of carpeting had been pulled up from one corner of the living room. Today, I don't even remember what had gotten the best of Larry, but I remember the aftermath vividly. We noticed that there were no other humans in sight. Also missing was our TV and Christmas tree. What was present was a trail of Red ribbons that my wife had so beautifully decorated the tree with. The trail led to the basement door. When I opened it, what did I find, but our TV, Christmas tree, the respite

worker and the two other clients, located at the bottom of the stairs. They had all taken shelter from Hurricane Larry.

When Larry had to wait for something, it was only a matter of time before everyone knew of his discomfort in waiting. Larry wasn't keen on waiting, and those close to him, were not keen on making him wait. As we approach the Holiday season I would suspect that there are some homes in a condition similar to my own. Ours contains a beautiful 8 year old redhead who barely let's an hour pass between aloud rehearsals of the things she is hoping to find under the Christmas tree. Anticipation. It is in the air, and it is in the passage we will look at today.

We will be camping out in Luke 2:22-33, but I want to start us off with a little perspective on the author.

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke was both a physician and a gentile, the only gentile author of any of the books of the bible. Luke penned this gospel, and the book of Acts. That means our stroll with Luke begins with Zechariah, Elizabeth and that other prophetic and impossible birth, that of John the Baptist, the forerunner, then we move to the Manger, to the Cross, to Pentecost, to the establishment of this thing called the church, to Stephens martyrdom, to the Jerusalem council, to the conversion and ministry of the Apostle Paul. Luke told the New Testament story essentially from beginning to end. What I really like about the Luke's writing style is his precision. He writes things carefully, and with great attention to those details which are important for the clear communication of God's message. Not that anymore needs to be said on this point, but let's not forget that the world renowned theologian, Linus picked this book for his nativity reading in the Charlie Brown Christmas special...

Luke 2:22-24

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons."

Let's jump into the story of this new family. So much is probably swirling in the heads of the new mom and dad. I distinctly remember the first time Kelly and I became parents, and the gut-wrenching feeling when it came time to leave the hospital with our son. We now had no choice but to do this parenting thing for real. It was intimidating, and I was keenly aware of my limits. I actually had the thought, these medical professionals must have lost their minds. I have no clue what I am doing, I have never done this before, and this helpless little thing is completely dependent on his mom and I (mostly his mom). That was us, and here is what we didn't have to deal with:

- Rumors of infidelity, premarital sex, and friends suggesting Divorce was probably the best option

- We weren't homeless, penniless, and wandering when labor started

- We were surrounded by medical devices and professionals, and they were surrounded by hay and farm animals.

There is no doubt that the God who chose them, also comforted and enabled Joseph and Mary, but imagine walking in their shoes and more importantly, inhabiting their thoughts. They must have been amazed, and terrified all at once. Remember, at this point in history there were only a handful of people whom God had brought into the Messianic loop, at least from a current events point of view. Joseph and Mary were on a very small island, carrying with them the Maker of that Island, and every island, and everything. What wonderment, confusion, excitement, curiosity, and worship must have filled their thoughts.

We find the family headed to Jerusalem to carry out their religious duty. Mary was considered ceremonially unclean after giving birth to the Savior. They were in Jerusalem to make an offering on Mary's behalf. Interestingly, the standard offering was a yearling lamb and a dove or pigeon, but, the law allowed for someone who was poor, and unable to afford the lamb, to offer two birds. Here again is another indicator of the earthly position this family found themselves in... They were poor, a part of the sea of humanity, with no reason to pay any particular attention to them. They were there to do their duty, and carry on trying to make a way for themselves. They did not stand out!

They were also there to dedicate Jesus, their firstborn son. Jesus, like every other male first born was to be set apart to God, as first commanded by God to Moses in Exodus. Again, this young family is going through the religious motions, sincerely, but almost as if there is nothing unique about them. Almost.... All of that is about to change. In walks Simeon....

Luke 2:25-33

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.

OK. Let's back up a bit. What just happened? Mom and Dad went to the temple to perform a ritual that was nothing, if not routine. They had financial problems, and were struggling to get by, and then, to top it all off this stranger runs up and grabs their precious little boy, Mary's treasure, and starts spouting craziness.

Maybe it wasn't crazy, but it was most certainly unexpected ...unexpected, startling, and then Mary and Joseph Marveled... Again, I am sure not for the first or last time...

... Let's look at Simeon. He was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel. This description makes Simeon a unique character as well. You know how it goes, you wait for something for a while, and then it slips from your conscious awareness, and get's replaced by the tyranny of the urgent. Not Simeon. The passage could well have read "Simeon had his head and heart right, and that fact placed him right where God wanted him" "waiting for the consolation of Israel". That consolation of Israel was both a person, and a movement of God. Someday, Israel would be made completely whole, but only through the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

God's task for Simeon was **as simple**, as it was **difficult**. A single word, wait. Something my friend Larry struggled with. Ever struggle waiting, even when you know you have heard from God? Remember Abraham and the hand maiden? Abraham had received a promise, just like Simeon. He **knew** God would make his seed as abundant as the stars. He knew this. After waiting a while, and watching the clock, he decided God needed some help, and stepped out, took control. Because of his small view of God.... Sarah was too old.... his plan would work better. He impregnated Sarah's Handmaiden and by that act, began a nation which ended up being destined to oppose God's people. I am certain if Abraham could turn back the same clock that he was impatiently watching, he would.

By contrast, while waiting for God's promise to materialize, our friend Simeon was in full communion with the Holy Spirit of God. There was no panic and no hurry. The Spirit get's mentioned 3 times in 3 verses.

Luke 2:25-27

*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*

I don't want us to miss this. Simeon was yielded. Folks, this is where you and I are going to find the rub. The place where we identify how and why our lives don't look like Simeon's. Three times we are told that Simeon had yielded control to the Holy Spirit of God. The spirit was upon him, The spirit revealed to him, and he was in the Spirit. Simeon was yielded.

If you are like me and struggle in this area, maybe you can relate to the Lyrics from Smell the Color Nine, by Chris Rice:

I would take "no" for an answer
Just to know I heard You speak
And I'm wonderin' why I've never
Seen the signs they claim they see
Are they special revelations

Meant for everybody but me?

Maybe I don't truly know You

Or maybe I just simply believe

'Cause I can sniff, I can see

I can count up pretty high

But these faculties aren't getting me

Any closer to the sky

But my heart of faith keeps poundin'

So I know I'm doin' fine

But sometimes finding You

Is just like trying to

Smell the color nine

Ever feel like Chris Rice? Like it is our responsibility to find Him? Boy what a sobering contrast Simeon presents us with. He isn't desperately looking for this opportunity God told him that he would own. He's just doing life. Walking with God, and literally stumbles, guided by the Holy Spirit of God, into his maker in the form of this new born, swaddled in blankets, and peering up at him with a heart melting grin. There was no striving, no impatience, no desperation, just yieldedness. And what a payoff, to get to hold the Messiah, as he is being presented as the first born of Joseph and Mary, and truly being presented as the firstborn of all mankind. Soak that up. I get chicken skin when I dwell on this moment, and all Simeon *did*, all that was required of Simeon, was yield to God. In turn God caused this most unlikely of meetings...

Now, let's punctuate that last point with Simeon's own Psalm to God.

Luke 2:27-33

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.

What a statement. Hear Simeon’s heart. I have held the Messiah, and I can go now. I am ready for eternity. There is no exaggeration in that statement. The pure joy he felt in playing this God ordained role with the Lord Jesus allowed him to truly say, there is nothing more for me here. I am ready to go. Then he closes with truth. Worshipful truth about all that Jesus was and intended to do.

Jesus is:

- God’s salvation incarnate
- in Him God’s salvation is revealed with clarity
- The true Messiah, the glory of God’s people Israel

So where do we go from here.

Can I ask, if you have never considered the claims of Israel’s Messiah, and your Savior. Would you do that today? He came with a singular purpose. That purpose is described in this passage by two words: Consolation, and Salvation. Jesus himself said later in this same book: “The son of man came to seek and save the lost”. You and I are the lost, the ones He came to seek, and to save. The same God that chose Simeon for an honor that caused him to rightly exclaim that he was ready for eternity, loves you and I enough to send his son in full satisfaction of all the ways we have offended Him. If you haven’t yet, today is a great day to yield to God and accept His gift, His heart, and your salvation. If the Spirit is nudging you to receive the gift of salvation that Jesus provided through His death on the cross, would you act on it? That Spirit that lead Simeon to his incredible encounter with the Savior wants to lead you to yours. He loves you, more than you can imagine. He waits to overwhelm you with his grace and love. If the Spirit of God is working in your heart, drawing you to him. Can I encourage you to tell someone? I think you’ll find inside these 4 walls a bunch of people who would love to celebrate with you, help you, and share their walk with Jesus, warts and all.

How about those of us who have been walking with Him for a while. I think Simeon might have a lesson for us, while we wait.

How are my friend Larry, and our friend Simeon different? Why are they different? Isn't there a little Simeon, and a little Larry in all of us? Friends, do this with me. Look down at your hands. Now open them. See, you can do this... You can release control, and the good news is that you never had control anyway. The only thing you just did is acknowledge reality. Larry and I are very good at making a tight fist, it's the opposite motion we struggle with. Maybe Larry and I are not alone.

Do you live expecting God to do what he has said? What has he said? What has pulled you off course?

Abraham heard from God, attempted to take control, and created a nation to oppose God's people... Disaster. Jonah heard from God, decided to take control, and got swallowed by a fish, disaster. Peter heard from God, walked with God in physical form, decided to seize control while seizing his sword in the Garden, and it ended in disaster. Paul knew God better than any of his contemporaries and decided that he would take control and eradicate this new thing called the church, which ended in disaster. When we try to seize control, we can expect disaster. An important caveat to these examples is this, remember God's plan was not thwarted by any attempt by his people to seize control. In every example, what God set out to do was accomplished. What suffered were the seizers of control...

Have you ever added an hour to your life? Nope, me neither, but I keep trying... Larry tried to control things he couldn't control. Simeon waited on the single power that has never been late, or wrong, or unkind, or ignorant.... While you wait. While you look forward to what God will be pleased to do, can I ask you to make this a habit? When you need to, stop yourself, look down at your hands, and slowly open them. Symbolically let go of that thing you are trying to control and wait with Joyful anticipation for what He is going to do! Stop trying to control, and contrive, and just yield.

Striving for control makes us poor ambassadors

As a young leader in a small church in Madison Wisconsin, I found a strong friendship with another young man. We were both church leaders for the first time, and we both shared a love

of impatience, and really encouraged each other in that area. When we were right, the thing we were right about could not happen fast enough. What I didn't see then, but see clearly now, is that my impatience led to judgment. My friend and I had long talks about our frustration with the pace of change in this old country church. We thought if we made this change or that, all would be well.... We were self-driven, not yielded. God wasn't really consulted with regard to our agenda. As I look back, I don't think I reflected Jesus very well in my impatience, in my pursuit of control.

I would really like to go back in time and have a conversation with 20 something Ken. I'd like to ask him this: In all of your striving, have you ever stepped outside of yourself and looked at yourself? In your striving, how much do you see the fruits of the spirit in your life? Imagine if impatience, drive, accomplishment, success, creating change, and self-righteousness, were on that list of the fruits of the spirit. How proud God would be....

Unfortunately, the list looks more like this: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. What a contrast! The word control even makes the list, but boy are we not fond of the word that precedes it, SELF. OK, I am sure we are all there, we want to see our lives dominated by the second list, and empty of the first one. How often do we tear up the living room carpeting hoping that the result will be a change in the network television schedule. It's a ludicrous thought right, but it is no more ludicrous than some of the things we try to control. Look at your striving, and how it changes you. Are we more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled, when you we are striving to control?

Our efforts to control reveal what we really believe about God

One more question on this issue of control. What does our striving for control say about what we truly believe about our God? It says we don't believe he is God. Any assertion that God needs our help, diminishes Him as God and raises us to a level of importance we don't deserve.

Growth is possible

May I encourage you with the end of Abraham's story. The same man that earlier in his life took impatient control and created a nation in opposition to God, later obediently took the promised son to a hill to kill him, at God's command, knowing that God would provide a way.

You know what we call that? Growth. If you have struggled with this issue of control and yieldedness, be encouraged. God is capable of causing you to grow, and best of all, he wants to see you grow, and will enable that growth. Jonah eventually went to Ninevah, Peter straightened up and wrote some of the wisest books of the new testament, and Paul, well he turned the world upside down for Christ. Growth is possible.

Yieldedness creates confidence

When we are yielded, we are confident in what God has called us to. Let me remind you of what I said earlier: Luke writes with precision. That means everything we need to understand the point of this passage is there in the text. It is also important what God, through Luke's pen did not record. If it isn't there, it didn't happen. Simeon wasn't arrested. There was no Amber Alert. Simeon didn't second guess if this was the right baby. His yieldedness created connectedness with God which, in turn, created confidence where none should have existed. That confidence made Simeon sure of something he couldn't be sure of. That he could grab this baby from his parents right there in a public place without consequence, and **with** great Joy and God's blessing. Think about that for a minute. Envious? I am. I have watched friends step out into God's will and shaken my head in admiration of their strength of faith. I want to be more yielded, more connected, and more confident as a result. I want to bring a smile to my father's face. Will you join me in becoming progressively more yielded?

Yieldedness produces Joy

The title slide shows a painting done by a Christian artist many moons ago. The artist is attempting to capture this moment that we have been looking at from the Gospel of Luke. The painting is not inerrant, but I think it does a great job of depicting the joy of this moment. Who doesn't want more Joy. God's promise from this passage is yield, and in your yieldedness you will find Joy. Not happiness, like spending an evening laughing at the hilarity of Tim Hawkins, but Joy, that doesn't fade, but abides through all the ups and downs of life.

As you listen now, please think of these words as a love song from a savior. Each time you and I grasp for control that we will never obtain, He does not react with judgment. Judgement was taken care of 2000 years ago. This song reflects the heart of God as his children struggle to relinquish something that was never ours. Hear His heart.