

Waiting Faithfully in Evil Times
The Rev. David Booman
Luke 2. 21-38 (St. Michael's – April. 19, 2020)

Waiting is hard. Especially in a pandemic. When will this end? When will our lives get back to normal? When will we find a cure? When will I go back to work? When will my loved one get home from the hospital? Waiting is hard. Especially in a pandemic.

The good news though, is we're not alone in our waiting. This is not the first time God's people have waited. Our passage from Luke is *suffused* with waiting, from beginning to end. Mary and Joseph have baby Jesus but then wait 30 years for those prophecies to be fulfilled.

Today we meet Simeon in the temple, who's been '*waiting for the consolation of Israel.*' We meet the prophetess, Anna, who's been fasting night and day in the temple—waiting for God's salvation. And finally at the end of the passage we hear of the crowds in the temple, who are '*waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*' They've been waiting 400 years for God to speak.

Yes, waiting is hard, but it seems to mark the lives of God's people. And so the question we're faced with is, 'What does it look like to wait faithfully?' Not impatiently, or with resignation, but faithfully?

I think many of us have more time on our hands than usual, and we don't really know what to do with it, and we're feeling a vague sense of guilt that we're not using it well. And this concern is good. Paul writes in Ephesians, 'Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil' (5.15).

So how do we wait faithfully in evil days? In today's passage there are five things God teaches us about waiting. Five things he calls us to in the time that we have.

And they are...

- 1) Be faithful in the small things.
- 2) Follow the Spirit.
- 3) Face death.
- 4) Fall on the sword.
- 5) Focus outward.

First, be faithful in the small things. Our passage begins with Mary and Joseph bringing baby Jesus to the temple. Why are they there? To fulfill the Law of Moses. Mary is to be ritually purified after childbirth, and Joseph is to make an offering of pigeons in the temple.

So not a big deal, right? Wrong! Imagine if you were the holy couple. You've spoken face-to-face with God's greatest archangel. You've carried the king of the universe in your womb.

Imagine how easy it would be to skip some of this ritual. You know, '*God has entrusted me with the care of His infant son. Does He really need me to travel all the way to Jerusalem to give him a couple of pigeons?*' You see that? And yet, Mary and Joseph are faithful in the small things. Mary is purified, Joseph makes the offering of pigeons. 'If you are faithful over a little, God says, I will make you faithful over much.'

What might faithfulness look like today? It could mean all kinds of things, but to begin with, we should make sure we're reading our Bible in quarantine. Make sure we're praying. And make sure we're tithing. And not because the church needs our money. God doesn't need pigeons or money. *But we need to feel that dependence on God that is expressed in sacrificial giving.*

And perhaps most importantly, if you've never done family worship before, now is the perfect time to start. In fact, just think—if today you begin a new rhythm of worship in the home, the coronavirus could be *the best thing that's ever happened to you*. We're talking legacy. Generations yet unborn may say, *'The coronavirus was when things changed and my family drew closer to God.'* Yes, God can redeem anything, even quarantine.

Did you know that in the early 20th century a million people died of tuberculosis in Europe? In Belfast TB was the primary cause of death among young people. And so children were often in quarantine during outbreaks.

One man who survived the Belfast epidemic as a child reminisced in this way, *'This recurring imprisonment [in quarantine, gave me and my brother] occasion and stimulus to develop the habit of creative imagination...and so in circumstances that might have been merely dull and depressing, my brother's gifts began to develop.'*

Who was this brother he mentions? None other than CS Lewis. Yes, Lewis might never have become the thinker he was, had he not endured quarantine. Be faithful in the small things. And don't limit what God can do.

The second thing God calls us to in times of waiting is to *follow the Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in our passage. Simeon is led by the Spirit into the temple at the precise moment Jesus is carried in. And Simeon sees him and bursts into song, the immortal the Song of Simeon. But it's all orchestrated by the Holy Spirit.

My friends, the Spirit is always leading and guiding us. Through little nudges. Through His still small voice. But oftentimes we miss Him because we aren't paying attention, or we ignore the nudge.

We may think that God speaks through burning bushes and visions from heaven. But no, the normal way God communicates is through His Word and the gentle nudging of His Spirit.

A few years ago I was walking around Colonial Lake early one morning reading my Bible. And there was a guy sitting on a bench. And as I finished my loop I felt a nudge to circle round one more time. No idea why. But the second time I walked by, the man said to me, *'I buried my mom yesterday. Do you have something in that book that will help me?'*

Well, I just happened to be in Philippians. And so I sat down next to him on the bench—his name was Abdul—and I read Philippians 2.21, *'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'* And Abdul said, *'Man, that's just what I needed. My mom had cancer, and she refused treatment because she was ready to go home to God.'*

Yes, these little nudges from the Spirit can make a big difference. And so don't discount them. Don't think it's something you ate. If somebody comes to mind, give them a call. I've heard beautiful stories of people connecting and reconnecting in quarantine as they follow the nudge. The Spirit will lead you, and others, to Christ.

The story of Abdul brings us to the third principle of waiting. Face death. This is sobering, but it's so important. For the Christian, death is not to be feared. Again, look at Simeon. How does he begin his song? *'Lord, now you're letting your servant depart in peace.'* Simeon knows he's going to die, but still he rejoices. He's seen the Savior. And that's enough. He's ready to go.

And so let me ask you my friends, very bluntly, are you ready to die? Are you ready to see Jesus face-to-face? Statistically it's likely that some of you listening now, will die in the next few weeks. I'm not being morbid. I love you and I want you to be ready. Can you sing joyfully with Simeon in the face of death? Can you honestly say with Paul, *'My desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better?'*

I remember once visiting a 100 year old lady in the hospital. She was very hard-of-hearing, but a strong woman of faith. And when I asked her what I could pray for she said, 'I'm tired and I want to be with Jesus.' And so I prayed at the top of my lungs, 'Lord Jesus take your daughter home to be with you.' And I can only imagine what the people in the hallway thought! 'Don't let that chaplain in *my* room.'

But seriously, if you don't feel that peace and assurance around death, the most important thing you could do today, is to ask God for it. And so if that's you, stop the video right now and pray. And say, 'God I'm afraid. But I want you to come into my life as my risen savior, to wash away my sins and to wash away my fear. Come Holy Spirit and give me the assurance of eternal life.' Stop the video right now and pray.

The fourth principle of waiting faithfully is to fall on the sword. After Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph, he gives them a warning: '*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 your own soul).*

What Simeon is saying is that Jesus will be incredibly polarizing. He will divide people. He will be opposed by people. And ultimately, he will break his mother's heart.

Yes, Jesus came to bring peace, but it was peace achieved through suffering. And when we become a Christian there's incredible joy, but there's also pain. This is the pattern of discipleship. Jesus said, 'Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me.' When God knocked the apostle Paul off his horse, God said, 'I will show him how much he must suffer.'

Suffering is our calling, our marching orders. And simply remembering this can provide great poise and resiliency. We aren't surprised. We aren't taken aback.

And the weird irony, is that the very thing about Jesus that polarizes people, is the very thing that allows Christians to wait with courage and hope.

Why does Jesus cause division? Because of the *immensity* of who He is. Jesus was constantly saying things that were incredibly arrogant and offensive—if He wasn't God. 'I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me.' 'The Son Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away.' And whereas the OT prophets spoke for God saying, 'Thus says the Lord.' How did Jesus speak for God? 'Truly, truly I say unto you.'

So the people were incredibly troubled. Many hated Jesus, but some asked questions, 'Who is this who forgives sins? Who is this that even the winds and the waves obey him?'

My friends, the truth is that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's the Way the Truth and the Life. He's our Rock, our Refuge, our Redeemer. He's our Helper, our Healer, our Hiding Place. He's the Living water, and the Good Shepherd, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And so fear not! Even when the sword of suffering comes. Because as Paul writes, 'If we have died with him, we will live with Him; if we suffer [with him], we will reign with him.'

Finally, the fifth principle of waiting in evil times, 'focus outward.' After Simeon delivers his warning, The holy family is then approached by Anna the prophetess. In verse 38 we read, '*And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*' Anna responds to Jesus by telling everyone about God's salvation.

My friends, the coronavirus may well be the best opportunity for sharing the Good News in our lifetime. People are facing death. They're open to spiritual things. And our God is in the business of using crises for His kingdom.

An example of this in closing. Earlier this year Jules Deas and I and ten other guys were part of a Dads group. And one night we were all in the chapel praying for each other. It was about 10:00pm. And

as we prayed for Jules one of the things we prayed was that God would give him opportunities to share to his faith.

Well that night Jules went home. His family was in bed, but he knelt at their bedsides and asked the Lord's blessing and protection. He then started to go outside to do the last thing he does *every* night before bed, moving his wife's suburban from the front of the house to the side of the house. If you know Jules, he's a very organized guy and he's done this every night for years. But *that* night he felt a nudge. And he thought, 'I don't have to move the car every single night.' And so instead, he went to bed.

About an hour later we was awakened by a massive explosion. It sounded like a bomb had gone off. He ran to the front door to look outside and saw his wife's car was gone. And then he saw a tire rolling across the lawn.

It turned out there had been a highspeed car chase with the police and a car traveling at over a hundred miles an hour had lost control and plowed straight into his wife's suburban. If the suburban had not been there the car would likely have gone straight into the master bedroom, where Jules and Katey were sleeping.

As you can imagine, in the days since Jules has has countless opportunities to share his faith with law enforcement, insurance adjusters, and others. In the midst of crises, God calls us to look outward with the gospel!

And so friends, in this Easter season remember that God cares for you. That he's calling you to worship and prayer. He's nudging you through His Holy Spirit. He wants to take away all fear of death and suffering. And he wants your light to shine brightly in these dark times.

Will you say yes to him?

Questions:

1. Where have you found God in recent weeks through simple faithfulness, the leading of the spirit, suffering, or gospel witness?
2. How might the Lord be calling you to make the best use of your time in these evil days?