

Waiting in Hope

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In the early 20th century,
French philosopher and mystic, Simone Weil
(pronounced variously as “vey” ... “vile” ... “wile”)
Simone wrote:

*Waiting patiently in expectation
is the foundation of the spiritual life.¹*

Think about that claim...
The heart of our spiritual life,
of our spiritual journey,
is all about waiting.
All about living into
the promise and revelation
of salvation for all.
About waiting for the fullness
of what God wants for the world,
to come into being:

healing,
liberation
and justice for all.

A world rooted in love:
receiving God’s love;
being transformed by God’s love;
and sharing God’s love.

Waiting... living into this amazing hope,
this is who we are
as people of God,
as people of faith.
We gather here this morning
to hold up that divine promise,
in our praise, our prayers, our songs.
We gather to take in that promise
to take in Jesus - the bread and the wine
to take in incredible hope
of wholeness for the world

We gather for that empowerment
so we can go out into the world
 full of the promise,
faithfully participating in that fulfillment now,
 keeping an eye out for its fulfillment now
and waiting for the coming again of Christ
in the fullness of his glory.

This is not easy.
How do we wait?
How do we stay faithful
when so much of what we see and know of this world
 is a mess?

The generations of my lifetime,
 my own, the ones before and after me
have all been shaped (and are still being) shaped by
huge periods of fear and hopelessness.
My grandparents grew up in the depression
 the economic foundation of all they knew – crumbled.

My parents grew up in the shadow of World War II
Then the fear of nuclear holocaust:
kids in school doing duck and cover drills.
 Terror instilled in a whole generation
 that one bomb, out of the blue, could destroy everything.

My own early childhood was in South Africa
 before apartheid crumbled
 I grew up scared by how governments perpetrate utter evil.

Kids after me, seeing the Twin Towers attacked:
 shaped by fear that a terrorist attack
 could come into their city, town, home – at any time.

Our littlest ones now, from preschool to college
 doing active shooter drills in their classrooms
 Right around here, shootings a few years ago at Santa Monica college!
 And active shooter lockdowns, at schools around Los Angeles
 because of live threats.

And now our youth, our young adults
 facing a future where climate change
 threatens the very existence of the planet.

How do we live in hope?

Frankly, I don't know any other way
than to cling to God,
cling to how God, in Jesus
intruded in the world
and continues to intrude in the world,
calling all of us into relationship
so we may know the promise of salvation for all
in the very marrow of our being.

And the best way I've found to discover
the nature of that hope,
and how to live into it
is to look at scripture.
In scripture we discover God revealing God's self
We see God's people,
wrestling with the same things we are.
We see how people over the millennia
have encountered God
encountered the Messiah
and lived into the hope.

The Gospel passage I just read
is perhaps the most densely packed collection
of people whose spiritual lives
are rooted in hopeful expectation,
rooted in waiting,
in faithfulness.

18 little verses give us four people
living into what it means to be faithful
in a time of worldly despair.
We have Mary and Joseph,
who are bringing Jesus
to the Temple
for the presentation.
This is 40 days after Jesus' birth,

when Jewish law prescribed
that first-born males
 be designated as holy to the Lord
And it is the time for
Mary's ritual purification after childbirth.
This moment reveals
Mary and Joseph's deep religious formation,
 their utter faithfulness to God
 and the law of Moses.
This is the home Jesus was raised in!
A home of faith,
a home of hearts open to God.

And then we have two elders
 Anna, a prophet in the Temple
 and Simeon, "righteous and devout."
Their world was as chock full
of potentially
hopelessness-inducing circumstances
as our own.
Jews, living under Roman occupation.
Roads around Jerusalem
dotted with huge crucifixes
 and corpse of rebels, resistors.

We have Simeon in the temple
 upon whom, we are told, the Holy Spirit rested
He is nearing the end of his life
waiting...
 for It had been revealed to him
 by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death
 before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.
And Anna – a prophet also near the end of her life.
Depending on the translation
she's either an 84-year old widow – having been married only 7 years
or she's been a widow for 84 years.
Either way, she, like Simeon,
has lived through decades upon decades of waiting.
And in her widowhood she is known as a prophet.

Prophets, in those days, were preachers, teachers, proclaimers.

Proclaiming the the Word of God

salvation history, the promise of salvation – the Messiah.

And prophets pointed to how all of that

relates to the world as it is today.

They point to

the disconnects between who God wants us to be and who we are,

the consequences of that disconnect,

and ways to return to right relationship with God.

So we have two people

who for decades have been waiting... faithfully...

immersing themselves in their faith

and suddenly baby Jesus arrives!

They both see this little baby as the Messiah,

Simeon sees the fulfilment of the Spirit's promise

that he wouldn't die before seeing the Messiah.

And Anna, the prophet,

so excited by what she sees that she

began to praise God

and to speak about the child

to all who were looking

for the redemption of Jerusalem.

I'm struck by how the decades upon decades

of faithful waiting formed both Anna and Simeon

to be able to instantly (*snap*) recognize our Savior.

And then the young Mary and Joseph,

living faithful lives,

yet whose lives are still being formed.

We usually think of Mary and Joseph,

by the time Jesus is born,

as being the two who "get" who their child is.

But this passage reveals that even with

Mary's encounter with the Angel,

and having just heard

the shepherds at the manger

ecstatically recount how the angels

told them Jesus was the Messiah...

... Even with all that,
Mary and Joseph are amazed
when Simeon raises baby Jesus
breaks into his song of praise, singing:

This baby is the salvation,
*a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
for glory to your people Israel.*

Waiting doesn't mean we don't have doubts.
Waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled
is actually a time of formation
a time of doubts
a time of learning
a time of opening our hearts minds and souls to God.

In the words of Henri Nouwen
*The spiritual life is a life in which we wait,
actively present to the moment
and trusting that new things will happen to us,
new things that are far beyond
our own imagination, fantasy or prediction.²*

Our call is to be faithful,
to turn our hearts towards Jesus,
to the transformative power of God's love.
Our call is to let waiting form us
To let waiting give us insights
give us new opportunities to see God
in our lives and in the world.

For our Savior has come in glory
light that the darkness did not overcome
and will not overcome.
May we embrace the promise of this light
and wait in hope and thanksgiving
as we behold the Messiah.

Amen.

¹ Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, (1951)

² Henri Nouwen