

Second Sunday in Easter ≅ Year B
Saint Paul's Episcopal Church
January 1, 2006

Waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

Lessons for the Day

- ✘ Psalm 8
- ✘ Exodus 34:1-8
- ✘ Romans 1:1-17
- ✘ Luke 2:15-21

Homily

I greet you in the name of **God our Creator, Christ our Brother**, and the **Holy Spirit** who sustains us and empowers us to love and serve them both. (Pause)

Amen.

Waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

We have waited with Ginny and Stephen for the arrival of little Eli Chandler -- waiting through all the tests and all the uncertainty that always accompany the birth of a little one.

We have waited through Advent to Christmas, so we could once again celebrate God's great gift of love to us in the Christ child.

And -- for those among us who are converts -- **we have waited** through the four long weeks of Advent until ***finally*** we could sing the Christmas carols we love so dearly.

Waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

Think for a moment about the **waiting** of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus' birth. They had waited for centuries for their Messiah: for God to provide a mighty political leader who would deliver them from oppression, or a savior who would free them from sickness and physical hardship.

Waiting ***truly was*** the hardest part of their loving . . .

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and today's Gospel lesson tells us, "he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb". It's easy for us to take this name for granted -- we've heard it so often. *Of course* they called him Jesus -- whatever else would they have called him?

But there's more to this name than meets the ear. Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Semitic word "Joshua" -- a word that means: ***"The Lord is salvation . . ."*** And salvation was something the Jews had been waiting for centuries. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jew's anticipation -- of their patient waiting.

Immediately after today's Gospel lesson we meet two experts in waiting -- Simeon and Anna. Let me tell you a little of Simeon's story -- I'll leave the reading of Anna's story to your later study.

Five verses after today's Gospel we pick up Luke's narrative again:

"Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. **Luke 2:25,26**
(NRSV)

Waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

Waiting ***is*** the hardest part of loving, and Simeon had been waiting -- perhaps for years -- to see the Lord's Messiah. Not only had he waited -- something we all must sometimes do -- but the text tells us ***he was right-eous and devout in waiting***. And that is something I can't always claim.

Simeon waited -- righteous and devout. And then the Gospel continues . . .

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law (that is, the presentation of the first-born to God), Simeon took (Jesus) in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to you word; for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to your people Israel." **Luke 2:27-32 (NRSV)**

Waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

If waiting is the hardest part of loving for all of us, what makes it so hard? Why do we struggle so?

I think we struggle because we know -- somewhere deep in our heart of hearts -- that ***things are not as they should be***. We look at the pain and the suffering all around us -- ***we look at the pain and suffering in our own hearts*** -- and we know that something is badly amiss.

If there is a God -- and we say we believe that there is -- then how did things go so badly awry?

And the answer is just this -- ***we live in an already/not yet world***.

We know that God is in Christ -- the very Christ whose birth Simeon celebrated -- reconciling the world (that's you and me and all of us) to God's own self. This reconciliation is already happening, right here, right now -- even as we gather here to participate in the Eucharist.

So God's ***reconciling love is already at work in the world, but it is not yet complete***. We ***long*** for that completion, we ***hunger*** for that completion, we ***wait*** for that completion.

And waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

So what can we learn from Simeon's story as we wait on God? How can we live out our lives in faithful waiting so that we, too, may be described as righteous and devout? There are at least **three things that Simeon's life suggests**; let's look at each of them in turn:

1) Remember why we are here.

Luke tells us that, "It had been revealed to him (to Simeon) by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah." Luke 2:26

Simeon was **someone who had been visited by the Holy Spirit**. He remembered that visit, and lived out of the visitation as he waited.

Likewise, **we**, too, have been visited by the Holy Spirit. Each one of us is here today for a reason. Some time -- and perhaps it was long ago -- God touched your life in a powerful way, and it changed the way you live and see the world.

Remember why you are here. In the hectic life of an already/not yet world, hold fast to the times that God has touched your life. **Remember why you are here.**

2) Live out of what we know.

Again, Luke tells us that Simeon was "righteous and devout". In this usage, the phrase means that Simeon was faithful in his observance of the Jewish Law.

We -- over against Simeon -- have the advantage of knowing the *rest of the story*. We have the adult Jesus summing up the Law and Prophets in these words, "Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind", and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 23: 37, 39b

We need to love our neighbor through service at Kid's Café, the Summer Enrichment Program, Samaritan Ministries or in whatever way heals this hurting world and our broken hearts. **And we need to love God** through faithful use of the gifts God has given us, be they intellectual, interpersonal, and monetary.

Live out of what you know!

3) Remember who God is.

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And we are helped immensely in our waiting if we remember who, exactly, this God is that we worship. We worship a God who keeps the promises God has made.

God promised Simeon that he would not see death before he had seen the Messiah, and God kept the promise. God promised Sarah and Abraham a son, and God kept the promise. God promises you and me healing and wholeness through life in Christ, and God keeps that promise.

Remember who God is!

Waiting is the hardest part of loving . . .

We live in an already/not-yet world that -- in the main -- does not encourage faith. But there is nothing new about this -- it was as true in Simeon's time as it is in ours.

And we -- you and I -- have a great advantage over Simeon. Simeon saw the *baby* Messiah. We have seen the saving work of Christ at Easter. We have read of the resurrection. And we can take Christ into our hands and our bodies in the sacrament of the bread and wine.

God made you, knows you, loves you, and wills only good for your life. God loves you -- always and in all ways.

And God is already at work in the world -- in ways far greater than we dare hope or imagine -- reconciling the world to himself. Be a part of that healing -- both for the world and for yourself.

The God who loves you is here now in the Eucharist. Take and eat.

AMEN