

Think about waiting. Sometimes there is a good reason to have to wait. Sometimes there are wonderful reasons not to wait. When we have to wait, whether we want to or not, how well do we wait?

Think of some of the times it was necessary for you to wait for something important. Was the wait easy or difficult, and how did that wait end? When I was in Middle School we waited every day for mail from Vietnam, to see how my father was doing. One day we received the good news that he was coming home in a few days. That was one of the longest waits I can remember as we worried about all that could go wrong but rejoiced in what could go right. I'll never forget standing at a little airfield at Fort Riley Kansas, as a C-130 finally landed and my dad really came home.

We really do spend a lot of time waiting, but that has always been the case. Mary and Joseph waited to get to Bethlehem after a long journey from Nazareth. Then they waited for a place for a very pregnant Mary to find some privacy and rest. After Jesus' birth they waited for shepherds to leave and started preparing to head home and begin their new life. I am certain they couldn't wait to go back to Nazareth, but their impatience was tempered by faith. They waited, as was the custom, to go to the temple and give thanks to God for this miracle of life. It was like our time of baptism, as we celebrate the miracle of life, and God's blessing confirms his presence and purpose.

They were waiting in the right way and in the right place. Because of faithful waiting, they encountered two grizzled veterans of faith, who had been waiting for most of their lives for this very moment. Simeon and Anna knew how to wait as they were certain of what they were waiting for – a long promised Messiah! . Faith erased any boredom, frustration, or impatience. They knew where to wait. How they waited announced what they were waiting for. The temple, in their time, was a symbol of God's presence, and they had been promised that when Messiah, God in the flesh, arrived, they would see him if they waited. And so they waited. Year after year they waited. Imagine instead if either had taken the day off, or decided to do something more exciting than waiting again? Because they were people of faith, and believed God's promise to each, they waited faithfully. And their wait was successful.

Eugene Peterson talks about waiting and wrote this: *“The person who looks for quick results in the seed planting of well-doing will be disappointed. If I want potatoes for dinner tomorrow, it will do me little good to plant them in my garden tonight. There are long stretches of darkness and invisibility and silence that separate planting and reaping. During the stretches of waiting, there is cultivating and weeding and nurturing and planting other seeds.”*

A wait without a goal is simple wasting time. A wait that is not attentive has no chance of being fulfilled. Simeon and Anna waited in the right place and in the right way.

They kept close to God because their wait was to see how God would come close to them. Can you imagine, for each, how fulfilled they were when they knew they would never have to wait again. The answer is in the prayer of response: "Lord now let your servant depart in peace." For peace is always the reward of faithful waiting.

How often does waiting gets in the way of living? Or does living gets in the way of remembering why faithful waiting is so important? When we wait without doing anything we are just wasting time. As we complain and grumble about inconvenient or confused waiting, the harvest will only be tension, fear, anger and resentment.

As we wait with eyes wide open knowing that we are not waiting alone, peace will always be part of the end of that wait. Faithful waiting is active waiting, it is being attentive to clues and messages and being alert. It focuses on the promises and rewards of God's loving wait with his daughters and sons.

One of the great lines from St. Paul is when he says, "In the fullness of time" ... when the time was right ... Jesus came!" Paul was able to look back and see the result of faithful waiting ... God's faithful people waited for his promise, and then it came true!

It is like nine months of pregnancy that precedes birth, and the waiting is forgotten. When that moment arrives, life takes on a new meaning. Any waiting ends with what we expect or in a way that is surprising. But as we wait with God at our side, no matter what, our waiting always has the promise of peace! And the faithful waiting of Simion and Anna allowed them to see the miracle of God in the flesh!

There was a story about a pastor from Illinois who visited Easter Germany during the Cold War. He had the opportunity to speak with Christians in East German, who lived separated from family and friends. He always asked if they thought the Berlin Wall would ever come down. The answer was always the same, "Not in our lifetime." He recalls bemoaning the tyranny of Honaker's communist regime one day, and having an East German pastor respond with a gentle rebuke -- "Honaker does not determine our future. Later, after the Berlin Wall fell, this pastor reflected on that experience. He says: "I am sure I was impressed by that pastor's piety, but I am not sure I thought he was very realistic, given the hard facts of geopolitics. But I ask you, who looks silly now? All those wise men, pundits, historians, not one of whom foresaw the collapse of communism, or my Christian friends who refused to give up hope even though there seemed no rational basis for hoping."

No matter how ordinary the day -- no matter how difficult the experience -- always remember that God loves you -- and is at work behind the scenes -- and is working to redeem your life. Never give up hope! Always believe! And then wait to see what wondrous things God will do.

So, how do we wait? Do we wait at the steps of the temple or distracted by the TV? Do we wait in fear or anticipation? At temple or distracted by TV ... in fear or anticipation? What is the balance between monastery and real-world living – the answer is all in how you wait and what you wait for ...

People living in a convent or monastery still have chores to support selves and others, which is a reminder of how waiting has a balance. Those of us in the outside world have different chores such as finding a quiet place to pray, or read scripture so that we don't forget the balance of faithful waiting.

We waited for Christmas and now that the wait is over we must review. Was the wait worth it? What have we learned from this wait so that our waiting in the months and years ahead will be influenced by a baby in a manger and old people like Anna and Simeon who never gave up their wait?

When my first wife was struggling with cancer, my prayers were always for healing and for more days. Gradually I came to realize I was waiting in the wrong way and prayed for God's peace no matter what came next. When she died that gift of peace changed my life. It was not my first choice, but God's best choice.

This was a wonderful lesson as I learned that people and situations around me might not change, but that God will always change me if I am open to a wait, he fills full. Our advent waiting this year was again rewarded as we got to see the baby Jesus just as Anna and Simeon did at the end of their wait. How could they ever have imagined how their waiting would end or what it would feel like to hold the infant Messiah? But because they waited in the right way, their celebration was more than they ever could have imagined, and their living was filled fuller than they ever could have hoped.

And so, it will be for us – don't be afraid to wait – just remember who is waiting with you and how God's presence in our midst will change that wait.

-- Seeber