

“Our Soul Waits”

Luke 2:22-40

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Designated Minister

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From the Pulpit of
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Let us pray: O Holy One, it is You who gathers us together as one people. And it is You who inspires us through Your word. O dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy, holy name. In Jesus’ name, we pray, Amen!

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What are you waiting for?

What are YOU waiting for?

And a follow-up question to that is: *How do you DO with waiting?*

- Have you ever found yourself tossing and turning throughout the night when you were anticipating having a difficult conversation with your supervisor or, perhaps, with one of your employees?
- Have you ever found yourself pacing the floors back and forth, back and forth, waiting for the news of the birth of a grandchild or a niece or nephew?!
- Have you ever found yourself checking your phone constantly – making sure that it was fully charged – and that the ring tone was on – as you anxiously waited to hear back from the doctor’s office with the results from some recent medical tests?
- Have you ever waited for an extended period of time at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles – *with* a brand-new driver – who was eagerly awaiting to be authorized as a licensed driver? (*This was the scenario in our family just this past week!*)

- AND have you ever waited for a bad haircut to grow out?! (*It can feel like an eternity!*)

How do **YOU** do with waiting?

I'm guessing that **many** among us can relate to at least one of the scenarios that I just described and have *countless other* personal examples of feeling anxious or impatient or overwhelmed – as each one of us have waited for critical news at some point – or for a particular outcome – or for some kind of resolution to a pending situation.

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Our Gospel reading from Luke this morning has **much** to teach us about the *spiritual practice of waiting*. In fact, **in** our **lectionary** cycle of readings – the *Revised Common Lectionary* that we follow (that most mainline Protestant churches follow) – we have to wait for **THREE YEARS** just to hear this inspiring Scripture reading about Anna and Simeon in worship ... this compelling narrative of **their** waiting for a lifetime – until they found peace – a *perfect* peace – that came with the fulfillment of a prophecy which was made known to them through the birth of the Christ child.

As I was reading various Biblical commentaries and preparing for this sermon during this past week, I learned that the Biblical Greek word for “waiting” is *prosdechomenos* (**PROS – DECH – O – MENOS**).

Prosdechomenos is a word that is used a number of times throughout the New Testament, but the Gospel writer of Luke uses it the most often.

It is a word that is translated as meaning: *to wait for, to anticipate, to accept, or an eagerness to welcome* – and *sometimes*, it is a word that is understood as a *readiness to receive*. I love that! **A readiness to receive.**

It is so meaningful – and beautiful – to see Anna and Simeon through this lens and in this light – given their openness and their readiness to receive the Christ child!

Both of them are believed to have been of advanced age.

Both of them were deeply committed to personal and spiritual growth.

Both of them were open to the mystery of life.

Both of them were able to embrace the unfamiliar and the unknown.

And both of them – in their later years – were **still** growing in faith and understanding.

Anna and Simeon have much to teach all of us – of *all* ages – about spiritual transformation as both of them waited and waited and waited for years – even for decades – for the **Truth** (*with a capital T*) – to be revealed to them.

The Gospel writer of Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has much to teach **ALL** of us – **today about the spiritual practice of *waiting!*** As you may know, this theme of **waiting** is often a central theme in the world of spiritual direction and discernment.

And I so appreciate the insights of the late author and sage, Henri Nouwen, who wrote quite a bit about the spiritual practice of waiting and discernment.

In the 2011 book entitled *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*, many of Nouwen's words of wisdom were recorded including the following insight:

He once wrote, “to wait with openness and trust is an enormously **radical** attitude toward life.” It is **choosing** to hope that something is happening **for** us that is far beyond our own imaginings.

And Nouwen goes on to say: Waiting with openness and trust is giving up control over our future and letting **God** define our life ...

And it is also living with the conviction that God:

- molds us in love;
- holds us in tenderness;
- and moves us away from the sources of our fear.

These words of wisdom that Nouwen wrote decades ago are, indeed, timeless, *and* they offer us assurance and hope as we navigate the twists and turns – and the ups and downs – of our own life’s journey!

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This morning, we have come together in a spirit of unity and faith as we worship together and stand *with* one another as 2023 draws to a close.

And, as we reflect on the personal experiences and life lessons that this past year has offered each one of us, we also anticipate the *new beginnings* – and the *new chapters* that are waiting to be written in the coming year.

And, we are reminded that with each new leg of the journey – or season of life – also comes the invitation and the opportunity to turn **toward** one another as we hold **all** of the “unknowns” together.

Among all of us here, this morning, each one of us will be making various and **significant** decisions in the coming year:

- decisions impacting ourselves or our families and loved ones;
 - decisions about our education and training or about our careers or our volunteer commitments;
 - decisions about our living arrangements and our health care and treatment decisions as well.
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And here, at First Church, we are also anticipating a year of significant change and transition as we prepare for Rev. Tim’s retirement later in the year.

And yes, while such a major change in pastoral leadership will naturally stir up a lot of strong feelings among us all, our faithful God who anticipates **all** of our needs (*before we even realize them ourselves*) is already actively and

faithfully providing us with what we need to navigate *such a time as this* **including:**

- inspired and deeply dedicated church leaders **and** staff members;
- church members who are highly motivated and equipped to share **their** gifts of time and talents;
- *numerous* commissions that are active and already engaged in the work of the church;
- we also now have a **Stephen Ministry Team** all of whom are well-trained and prepared to offer emotional and spiritual support to our members and friends.
- **we also have** a Healthy Congregations leadership team that continues to plan workshops and trainings regarding the themes of transition and change within congregational life;
- **AND** First Church is made up of **ALL OF YOU**, our active church members/friends, who are deeply committed to the mission and ministries of First Church.

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Our Gospel reading this morning is truly a gift and a reminder and a **promise** as we cross over the threshold into the new year.

And, once again, we are inspired and we are reassured that the faithful God who **answered** the prayers of Anna and Simeon two thousand years ago – is the *same God* who continues to guide us and shepherd us and hold all of us together – as we step into this new year of hope and promise that awaits us as the *faithful* people of God!

Thanks be to God, amen!

