

“The Preference of God”

Salado UMC—1st Sunday After Christmas Day
Preaching Text: Luke 2:36-40—27 December 2020

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**“It is well, when judging a friend, to remember that he is judging you with the same
godlike and superior impartiality” (Arnold Bennett).**

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During Advent, we as a faith community pray and talk about waiting. We speak of expectation and anticipation. In fact, Advent teaches us is how to wait. This waiting leads to Christmas Eve and we light the Christ candle. Presumably, this lighting means that our wait for Christmas is over. But now—so we think—we have accomplished our waiting because Christmas is now past. We think it is now the time to move on. Yet, today’s scripture addresses waiting of a different order—waiting for something so important to our lives that the wait may consume a lifetime. This waiting is about where and how the Messiah may come to us.

Warren Wiersbe observes, “The ability to calm your soul and wait before God is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. Our old nature is restless . . . the world around us is frantically in a hurry. But a restless heart usually leads to a reckless life” (*Men’s Life*, Spring, 1998).

Today’s text recounts a woman with true patience while waiting. She is a counterpart to another person from Luke who knew about waiting—Simeon.

Mary and Joseph met Simeon when they dedicated Jesus in the temple. Luke writes that Simeon “was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.” Luke further tells readers, “It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.” The Spirit guided Simeon to the temple and he saw Jesus. He took the child from Mary (imagine Mary’s anxiety) and sang a lovely song titled in Latin *Nunc Dimittus*. Listen to the poem/song’s familiar words:

**Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your 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 glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:29-32).**

At the end of this scene, Luke introduces Simeon’s gender counterpart—Anna.

[36] There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, [37] then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. [38] At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. [39] When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. [40] The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him (Luke 2:36-40).

Remarkable about both Simeon and Anna was that not only did they know how to wait, but did so with persistence. My guess is that it is because of this trait that Luke remembers Anna to us—we know little else about her. We do know that she was an elderly widow of the tribe of Asher. We do know that she served daily at the temple. We do know that she, like Simeon, recognized the infant Jesus as the Messiah. We also know that she is the only woman in the New Testament designated as “prophetess.” Other than these details, we know little. Yet, Luke speaks of her in almost reverent tones. Why? Because she knows what she needed to see and to experience. She waited for the fulfilment of her faithful resolve. Friends, this is a characteristic of which we could all use more.

G. Campbell Morgan, a preacher of an earlier day, noted:

Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given.

Anna clearly was the kind of person that G. Campbell Morgan had in mind when he described a Christian person waiting.

When it comes to being “on alert,” ready at any moment to do the job, it’s hard to beat the Pony Express. This historically famous mail service between St. Joseph, Missouri, and California depended on constant readiness—like Space Force. The Pony Express formed relay stations every ten to fifteen miles. A rider would shout as he approached a station, giving the station master the short notice that he needed to be outside with a fresh mount. Even when a rider came to the station where he was to spend the night, already mounted was another rider waiting and ready to grab the first rider’s bundle of packages and continue the trip.

The completion of the transcontinental telegraph system soon rendered the Pony Express obsolete after only eighteen months. But we have this service’s example of what it means to be ever watchful (*Today in the Word*, December 1997, p. 17).

Most people think that great artists and musicians produce their art in relatively quick bursts of creativity. Yet, facts suggest otherwise. Music historians tell us that Beethoven rewrote many bars of his music at least a dozen times.

For his work “Last Judgment,” considered one of the world’s twelve master paintings, Michelangelo produced more than 2,000 sketches and renderings during the eight years it took him to complete his masterpiece. We might say that anything of lasting value requires patient commitment, even in adversity.

Finally, one of our own Texans provides us with a shining example of a person who knows the meaning of persistence and waiting. During the Vietnam War, Ross Perot decided he would give a Christmas present to every American prisoner of war in Vietnam. According to David Frost, who related this story, Perot had thousands of packages wrapped and prepared for shipping. He chartered a fleet of Boeing 707s to deliver them to Hanoi, but the war was at its height, and the Hanoi government refused to cooperate. No charity was possible, officials explained, while American bombers devastated Vietnamese villages. Perot even offered to hire an American construction firm to rebuild what Americans had destroyed. The Hanoi government still refused Perot’s offer. Christmas approached, and the packages were unsent. Refusing to quit, Perot took off in his chartered fleet and flew to Moscow, where his aides mailed the packages, one at a time, at the Moscow central post office. The international mail delivered the gifts intact.

If you have a New Year’s prayer, then make it a prayer to be able to wait with great patience like Anna. Her persistent waiting paid off. She saw the Lord. Amen.

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