**Jesus Comes ... to those who wait**

**Luke 2:22-38; Psalm 130**

Thought for Meditation:

When tragedy strikes, when trouble comes, when life disappoints us, we stand at the crossroads between hope and despair, torn and hurting. Despair cements us in the present; hope sends us dancing around dark corners trusting in a tomorrow we cannot see. Despair says that there is no place to go but here. Hope says that God is waiting for us someplace else. Begin again.

*Joan D. Chittister, O.S.B., The Psalms: Meditations for Every Day of the Year*

Sermon

It is time for true confessions here. I want to see a show of hands. How many of you, at some point in your life, have ever snooped and found out what you were getting for Christmas before you were supposed to know? I think I was in the 6th grade when I looked under my parents bed and found a little box with a watch that I was going to get. It was fun to snoop and I was proud of myself for finding it, but Christmas morning was a bit of a let-down. It is the waiting, the anticipation, that makes the fulfillment even better. In our Scripture lesson this morning we heard the stories of two people who waited for many years. Let’s look at these stories.

According to Jewish law, forty days after the birth of a baby, the parents were supposed to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice. The sacrifice was to purify the woman after childbirth and to offer the child to God. Mary and Joseph went to the Temple to offer their sacrifices, and while they were there they met two people who had been waiting for the Messiah.

The first person was Simeon. Luke tells us that Simeon was a good man who was waiting for the Messiah to deliver Israel from its bondage. At some point, earlier in his life, the Holy Spirit had told Simeon that before he died he would actually see the Messiah. At the same time Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the Temple to see Jesus.

Last Sunday I was down by the Coffee Café, right before Sunday School started. Becca Wiley was holding her daughter Harper, who is about 8 months old. I stuck out my arms to Harper, not really expecting her to come to me, but she did. She trusted me. So did Becca. Becca doesn’t know how many kids I’ve dropped on their heads. Imagine what Becca might have done if a total stranger came up and tried to take Harper. That is what Simeon did with Jesus. He walked right up to Mary and took Jesus in his arms, and prayed. “Thank you God for showing me the Messiah, the one who will bring salvation to all your people. Now I’m ready to die.” That is a rather odd thing to say about a child. I imagine that Mary and Joseph were a bit overwhelmed by this. Luke doesn’t tell us how old Simeon was, but from his statement that he was ready to die, he probably was an old man, who had waited for many years for God’s promise to be fulfilled.

The second person who waited to see Jesus was Anna. Luke tells us that Anna was as prophet who was a very old lady. She had been a widow for many years. She was at the Temple all the time, worshipping, praying and fasting. After Simeon had seen Jesus Anna came up and began to praise God for the redemption that Jesus would bring. Simeon and Anna both waited and finally saw the Messiah. Jesus comes to those who wait. [5:00]

Let’s be honest – we don’t like waiting. It raises our anxiety level and makes us uncomfortable. We may not like waiting, but we get a lot of practice at it. That doesn’t mean we are very good at it. We live in a fast food society that does not want to wait. We want our food, our answers, our results, our spiritual maturity, right now. Yet we wait – at the post office, for test results from the doctor, in lines at the grocery store, at the hospital. Waiting is an inevitable part of life. We can’t choose not to wait. What I’d like to suggest this morning is that we can learn and grow through our waiting. Let me suggest two lessons we can learn from waiting.

First, waiting teaches us to choose to hope that the future is in God’s control. Waiting is not a choice. You can’t change the fact that you have to wait 26 days until Christmas. If you are driving into town and the tunnels are backed up, there isn’t much you can do about it. You are going to wait. However, as you wait you can choose your attitude. As you wait you can choose to be bitter and angry, or you can choose to have hope and excitement, anticipating something good.

Luke tells us that Simeon was looking forward to the consolation of Israel. Simeon looked to the future and expected it to be good. He anticipated a wonderful future. Simeon had no idea what the future would be like, or what Jesus would be like as Messiah. The only thing he knew was that he would see the Messiah, and he trusted that God would make the future better than the present. Simeon chose to have hope that the future would be good.

Winston Churchill planned his own funeral. It was at St. Paul’s Cathedral, in London. After the benediction there was a bugler high up on one side of the dome. He played taps, signaling that the day is over and Churchill’s life had ended. Then another bugler, on the other side of the dome, played revile, signaling that a new day had just begun. For Winston Churchill this was a sign of the hope he had in the resurrection and in eternal life. Churchill expected, and anticipated, that the future would be better.

We all wait, for many things. As we wait let us choose hope. Choose to trust in the goodness of God. Let us anticipate that our future, both here on earth and ultimately in heaven, will be good, because it is the future that God has planned for us.

There is a second lesson that Simeon can teach us. True peace comes through seeing Jesus, through being in a relationship with Jesus. At some point in Simeon’s life he had a powerful spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit came to him and revealed that before he died he would see the Messiah. I can’t imagine anything quite like that – God speaking clearly and directly to him. Yet it didn’t bring Simeon peace. He found peace only when he saw Jesus. “Master, not you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Luke 2:29-30). Peace comes from seeing Jesus. Jesus is the source of our peace and our salvation.

Think of the news from this past week: the Grand Jury announcement in Ferguson and the riots and looting that followed; the continuing Ebola crisis; wars and terrorism in the Middle East and other places throughout the world. Just thinking about those stories raises our level of anxiety level. Add to that the level of emotions that have been stirring in this church and the issues in your own personal lives. We desperately need peace and we look for it in all sorts of ways. Friends, the peace that we long for is found through seeing Jesus, through a relationship with our Lord and Savior.

 A sociologist went on an expedition with a group of mountain climbers. He observed that there was a direct relationship between the amount of cloud cover and the level of contentment. When the sky was clear, when there were no clouds and the climbers could see the mountain peak, the team of climbers worked harder, they got more done and enjoyed themselves more. When the clouds covered the peak and hid the sun, the energy level of the climbers was much lower. They were more sullen and selfish. They fought amongst themselves more.

There is a lesson in that for the life of faith. When we take our eyes off Jesus, when we focus on ourselves, on our problems or our weaknesses, we end up bickering with one another. We don’t experience peace. We must keep our eyes focused on Jesus. Peace comes from knowing and seeing Jesus.

Life is filled with waiting. Some of you are waiting for this sermon to be over. Others are waiting for Christmas. Some are waiting to see family and friends over the holidays, or even just to hear from them. Some are waiting for lab reports from the doctor or to hear about the job you are hoping to get. Some of us don’t even know what we are waiting for – we just have a general sense of restlessness. As we wait let us choose to wait with hope, trusting that God is in control. And above all, let us wait for the moment when we will see Jesus and receive his salvation.