

**“We Have Waited”**  
**New Year morning**  
**Cathy Cryder**

**January 1, 2012**

Imagine a Dialogue...

S: Anna...

A: Simeon?

S: I thought I would wait for you.

A: Have you been waiting long?

S: Seventy years.

A: So have I

*(Pause)*

Are you sure?

S: Are you sure?

A: Yes... I saw him.

S: Anna, I held him.

I held him in the crook of my arm,  
and let this wrinkled hand touch his brow  
and I felt young again.

Yes... I'm sure.

A: You spoke to them?

S: Yes, to her more than him.

I told her what I was told to tell her.

A: How did she take it?

S: Who wants to hear about death so close to birth?

She took it like one who knew  
that through her child  
the best and worst will change place  
all the time.

A: What now?

S: A bottle of wine and bread from the bakery.

A: Can I join you?

S: I was just going to ask.

*-from Cloth for the Cradle by Iona Community*

In 1990 poet, Mary Oliver wrote the following words...

“I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?”

Mary Oliver

“Tell me, what it is you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”  
Simeon and Anna waited. If you look up the word “wait” in the dictionary you might read the following...

1. To remain inactive or in a state of repose until something expected happens
2. To be available or in readiness
3. To remain neglected for a time
4. To postpone or delay something or to be postponed or delayed
5. To look forward to eagerly

I wonder which one of these definitions best describes the kind of waiting that Simeon and Anna did... for 70 years. Here is what we know about them.

Simeon lived in Jerusalem. He was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen God's anointed one.

Anna was a prophetess and the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

We learn a little bit more about Anna than we do Simeon in these brief passages from the book of Luke. What we can glean is that it is unlikely that they did the kind of waiting that involved being inactive, neglecting, postponing or delaying. It is likely that the words used to describe their kind of waiting may be more consistent with anticipation, preparation and readiness.

As a child I would hear this story and it always felt like there wasn't quite enough information about who these people were and what they did after they had seen God's chosen one, "... the consolation of Israel." Had I been in a Godly Play Room on Sunday mornings I might have been able to wonder about all sorts of things.

- I wonder what Simeon did when he wasn't at the temple.
- I wonder if Simeon and Anna ever got frustrated that they were waiting for so long.
- I wonder if they ever doubted God's promise.
- I wonder if Anna liked staying at the temple and if she ever slept... and if she did sleep; where. Did they have beds at the temple? Seventy years is a long time to stay awake.
- I wonder if Simeon looked anywhere else for God's promise.
- I wonder how old were they when they first knew that this is what they were waiting for. Could they have been children?
- I wonder if they did anything special to prepare themselves for the moment when they would finally encounter the Christ.

How amazing it must have been to know something because God had made special effort to ensure that they knew it. Were there others that were waiting and watching? Were there others that God had been attempting to engage in the process of waiting that were far too busy to hear or know what was coming into their midst. I wonder if there are things that God wants us to know. If yes, how do we wait in ways that facilitate our ability to recognize what we are waiting for when we see it? Do we have to be of an advanced age to before God's promise to us is fulfilled? I wonder...

Fortunately, I have people in my life that can make my wondering about such things rich and fruitful. Two of these people are Roger (my dad) and Sam (my nephew). My dad turned 78 this past year and Sam will be turning 5 in April. Roger and Sam have a relationship that was meant to be. My dad is a practical, pragmatic guy who has never been known to be effusive. However, when it comes to Sam, he "effuses!"

Dad and Sam play and talk together just about every day. Sam has always thought of dad as something "other" than your "run-of-the-mill adult." Before Sam began preschool, he turned to dad one day and said, "Pop, you're my best friend." To watch the two of them play and converse feels a little like watching kindred spirits exploring the gentle, wise, wondrous and humorous things that make life good and worthwhile.

So, did my dad wait 73 years in eager anticipation of the arrival of Sam? No. At the same time, when Sam arrived Dad was swept up into a relationship that was worth waiting for... a relationship that would not have been possible back in the days we he had to put in a full work week and parent three AMAZING children. I am fairly certain that none of my daughters would ever say, "Mom, you're my best friend." And, even if there are days that I might yearn to hear those words, a parent/child relationship is very different from that of a grandparent/child relationship. My responsibility is not to be my child's best friends. I will have to wait for the opportunity to engage in the kind of relationship a grandparent (or an elder with a meaningful connection) and child might have.

If life is about waiting... how are we being called to wait? If life is about waiting then how will we know when we have seen or touched what we are waiting for? Will we see it once in our life or will we see it over and over again? And, if we see it over and over again, will respond the same way each time?

As we are still in the season of Christmas it seems appropriate to call to mind the story of St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas was born in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to wealthy parents (no stable, no manger). He grew to be a person of deep faith and extraordinary generosity. He had a massive space in his heart for children and this informed the way that he chose to live "his one wild and precious life?" St. Nicholas believed that each child that was born into that world bore within them a little bit of the Christ Child. Each gift that St. Nicholas gave to a child was a gift that he was giving to the Christ Child.

Many believe that each time a child is born, a little bit of God is borne into the world. What an amazing thought. If we accept that this is true, then I wonder what this really means for each one of us. I wonder what this means for God's creation. Who was waiting for our "one wild and precious life?" Who or what is it that we are waiting for? And, how do we wait? Do we reach out to others? Do we give not only from our abundance but sacrificially? Do we wait with eager anticipation?

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