

Scripture: Luke 2:25-26, 36-38
Message: Anticipation
January 7, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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A wise cousin once said to me, “The greater the anticipation, the greater the enjoyment.” In other words, the more you long for something and wait for it, the greater the enjoyment when you actually receive it.

If that’s true, then there are a lot of things that we will really enjoy, because we do a lot of waiting. We have waiting rooms, and waiting lines. We wait to be seated, and we wait on the phone to speak to the operator. Our life is one mad rush to get from one wait to another, from one line to another, so we can wait for another red light.

Then there are those common sayings which we have all heard: “Good things come to those who wait” and “Some things are worth waiting for.” So what are you waiting for?

Some of you are of the age that you remember the Heinz ketchup commercial: Anticipation...it’s making you wait, and it’s worth it, because it’s Heinz. What is the focus of your anticipation?



Simeon and Anna were two people who were waiting, who were living in anticipation. The particular word used in the original language means more than waiting in line at the grocery store or waiting for the light to turn green. It carries the meaning of “to be looking for, to eagerly expect.” There’s an eager anticipation of something going to happen.

Simeon was eagerly expecting “the consolation of Israel.” Anna spoke to all who were eagerly expecting “the redemption of Jerusalem.”

They were eagerly expecting, anticipating, the fulfilment of God’s prophecy in Isaiah 40: “Comfort, consolation to my people, says your God...her hard service has been completed, her sin has been paid for.”

They didn’t know *how* God would provide that consolation. But they knew it was coming. God would bring comfort and peace and a restored relationship to his people. God is faithful to do what he promised.

When they saw Mary and Joseph approach with the baby Jesus, they knew the promise was fulfilled. The anticipated consolation and redemption had come.

In a baby. Was that what they expected? Or had they anticipated a victorious military leader who would push out the Romans? Had they anticipated a righteous religious leader who would effectively bring revival, drawing people to express a living faith and dedication to God?

Were they anticipating a baby?

We don't know what they were anticipating. We *do know* that they were convinced that this baby was the one they had been eagerly waiting for. This baby would bring consolation, comfort, peace, salvation, renewal to God's people Israel and beyond. This baby would be a light for revealing God's consolation and comfort and redemption to the Gentiles, to all people.

What are you eagerly waiting for? What are you anticipating that God will do in 2018? It's so easy to coast comfortably along. It's so easy to settle in to the routine and move along with the same old same old, like the comfort of an old lazy boy chair. Why expect anything different? Eagerly waiting for something has so often led to disappointment because what was anticipated never comes. Or what comes is a letdown. Nothing's going to change. Why should it? Besides, who needs change? We like being comfortable.

That might be true. If you don't expect too much, then you probably won't be disappointed.

But is that the God we believe in and serve? Is the God we worship and trust a God of the status quo, of keeping things the same? What if we anticipated that God would do something, or some great things, in our lives and in his church? What if we anticipated God's abundant blessing to be poured out on our family or on this community? What if we were eagerly waiting to see what God would do in 2018? What would it look like to eagerly wait for Jesus to come again?

What would that kind of eager anticipation look like?

Perhaps, like Simeon and Anna, it would look like an excited, committed devotion to God. Simeon was righteous and devout. He was alert to the moving of the Holy Spirit, and followed those nudges of the Spirit. Anna lived a life of worship, of fasting and praying. Their walk with God was vibrant and constant. Their expression of waiting was not passively sitting around, twiddling their thumbs, waiting for God to do something. They were eagerly alert, expectant, learning and understanding God's promises so they would be aware of their fulfilment when it happened.

I present this as a challenge for us as God's people here at Bethel Church. There has been talk about what God is doing at Bethel and in our community, especially since we went through the Church Life Cycle workshop three years ago. Then, this past November at our congregational meeting, we talked about shifts that need to take place in the church.

Our talking is moving to action? We are seeing God at work in our church. For a long time we have focussed on being an immigrant church; it's how we started, welcoming new Dutch immigrants to Canada. And we did very well at that. We have spent many years caring for each

other, looking inward. More and more we are looking outward, to the needs of those beyond our immediate church family, and into the community around us. What do we eagerly expect God to continue doing at Bethel? How will we know?

Will you join me in committing yourself to growing in prayer and God's Word? Many already do that and that's excellent. For others, this is God's challenge. It's not a duty or a chore, one more thing for a busy schedule. Let it be a practice of eagerly listening to God and confirming what he is doing.

What will it look like? 5 or 10 minutes every day? Alone? With someone else? Reading the TODAY devotional for the rest of January with an ear to hearing what God is saying to you personally or to our church as next steps to take? You can read the print version that was in your mailslot, or find it online on our church webpage or download the app so it comes up on your phone everyday.

Going through the questions for reflection listed in the bulletin or in the January Bethel News? Going through those questions not for sermon or service evaluation, but to reflect on what God is saying to us individually through morning worship.

Will you join me in eagerly waiting, not telling God what we want him to do, but waiting to hear his nudge, his leading into new opportunities? It might change how we pray or read or listen. Will you act on God's nudges, stepping forward into the next steps that God shows us? Will you share what God reveals, or share your experiences of following God's nudges?

We might be surprised by what God reveals. Simeon and Anna saw God's promises fulfilled in a baby. What God reveals as his consolation, peace, redemption, might not be what we expect. It might not be what we want.

God might convict us of sin or a grudge that we have been suppressing, but which needs to be confessed before he can do his work in our lives or in the church.

We might find ourselves in a time of pain or struggle as the place where we learn to depend on his strength

He might reveal an opportunity to love a neighbour whom we might not have considered to be a neighbour, someone we might even consider inconvenient and irritating.

God might surprise us with a growing awareness of evil and suffering and injustices of the world as we begin to hunger and thirst for his righteousness.

God might confirm a different priority or emphasis than what we have held on to for years.

If we eagerly anticipate God to help us walk more closely with him, he might surprise us with putting us in situations that require more humility, gentleness, patience, and understanding that we thought we had.

Waiting is not necessarily glamorous. But sometimes it is what God calls us to do. Wait. Eagerly expecting. Actively waiting.

Psalm 27:14, “Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”

Psalm 33:20, “We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.”

Psalm 130:6, “I wait for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning.”

Lamentations 3:26, “it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”

Romans 8:23, “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”

Romans 8:25, “But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.”

It’s hard to wait. We want to do something great. We know God has gifted us and called us to do something great, but it might not seem like anything is happening in that direction. That might be because God is calling you to wait.

Let this waiting be a fruitful time of learning from God’s word, listening to him, finetuning our hearts to the nudge of the Spirit, becoming as much like Jesus Christ as we can.

Simeon and Anna knew that the consolation of Israel was the coming Messiah. They knew he was their hope! That same Messiah is coming back! We are still supposed to be waiting for him! The question is—are we?

If we truly believe that Jesus is coming again, what should our lives look like? Our lives should display what we are looking forward to. Simeon and Anna spent their time eagerly awaiting, worshipping God and telling others about the Messiah who had come. How can we be expressing that eager, active waiting?

So I will ask again, what are you eagerly waiting for? What are you anticipating God to do in 2018? Let’s be a people of prayer and of the Word and action. Prayer and God’s Word keeps us in communication with God, attentive to his working, challenging us to action. May God prepare us to see how Christ is at work by stirring up a longing for consolation and redemption that can come only from Christ. Set your heart on Jesus, and eagerly wait for what God will do.



Trust in his timing,
Rely on his promises,
Wait for his answers,
Believe in his miracles
Rejoice in his goodness,
Relax in his presence.

Amen.