

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "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." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

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, 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. 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. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Ruby Bridges was born on Sept. 8, 1954 in Tylertown, Mississippi. Her family moved in 1955 to New Orleans where they thought they would find better opportunities. They certainly found a change; when Ruby was six years old, desegregation became a reality, and Ruby was among only six children who passed a screening test for admittance to the newly "integrated" school system. I wonder what she and her family expected of this integration?

Whatever they may have expected, what she got was an escort of four federal marshals taking her to her first grade classroom through angry protesters and militant segregationists. She was the first and only black student at William Franz public school.

Only one teacher was willing to teach her. No students were willing to sit in a classroom with her. She learned as a class of one with Mrs. Henry guiding her lessons. And she never missed a single day of school, waiting all the while for integration to become not just a legal reality but a cultural value. And the truth is that, even though school integration has come a long way since the 1960s, she is in many ways still waiting for true integration, and for racial justice and equality to become the reality. She is now the chair of the Ruby Bridges Foundation, which she formed in 1999 to promote the values of tolerance, respect, and appreciation of all differences. In describing the mission of her foundation, she says, "Racism is a grown-up disease, and we must stop using our children to spread it."

On the days when I feel like I have waited *forever* for the world to turn and things to get better, her story puts mine in a bit of perspective. Sure, I've waited at various times. Especially when it comes to the long arc of justice, I feel like I have waited - and right now it seems like I will be waiting even longer; like maybe I will be waiting forever. But my experience with waiting for justice is dwarfed next to hers. This is a woman who knows how to wait.

The fact is, we spend a good share of our lives waiting - existing in one state of being, while hoping for something yet to come. Most of us aren't very good at it. This becomes very clear if you've ever waited in line at the DMV. We don't really know what to do while waiting, even for the little, everyday things. There are only so many times you can check your phone. There's nothing you can do about it, sometimes you just have to wait. So waiting can make us feel powerless, anxious about a future we can't control. And that's just the checkout line at the grocery store.

I'd be willing to bet most of us know what it's like to have that anxious, powerless feeling amplified many times over as we've waited for relief from pain or sickness or grief. If you've waited through unemployment or infertility or addiction, you know what it's like to feel out of control, teetering on the edge of hopelessness as you wait for something better. And we all live in this imperfect world, in which so many things happen that we can't understand or explain. We are all subject to the shifts of nature, and the mortality of ourselves and those we love, and systems of injustice that seem far beyond us, and the unpredictable cruelty of other human beings. We all know what it's like to wait and hope for a world that is kinder, fairer, more just and peaceful.

Simeon and Anna spent their whole lives waiting. By all accounts, both of them were advanced in years. Simeon had been promised that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah; one gets the feeling that maybe he had been waiting around a bit

longer than he might have expected to be alive by the standards of that day. Anna was 84 years old - reasonably far along in years even now, but miraculously old for a woman of that time. Both of them had waited for decades to see the one who would save their people. If anyone knew about how to wait, it was these two.

And for us, who are so much in a state of waiting, Anna and Simeon and Ruby Bridges might serve as examples that will help us endure well while we wait - and not just endure, but *wait actively* - which I realize sounds like a contradiction, but bear with me. We may be powerless to control *when* our redemption arrives, but we are not powerless when it comes to what we do in the meantime.

The first thing Ruby, Anna, and Simeon show us is how important it is to *show up*. When Simeon felt the leading of the Spirit, he didn't sit around and debate with himself about whether he could maybe go tomorrow instead. He didn't say, "Well, it's not my Temple day." He didn't discount the tug on his soul and go about the routine of his day. He went to the Temple.

Anna didn't even have to go to the Temple to see Jesus; she was already there, waiting day and night, *living* in the place she needed to be when her redemption arrived. And Ruby Bridges went to school, every day, even when no one else wanted her there, even when angry and armed crowds tried to keep her away. She just kept showing up.

So where is it that you need to be, for the good of yourself and for the good of the world? Where do you need to *show up*?

Woody Allen once said that 80% of life is just showing up, but that still leaves another 20%! So, the second lesson I think we can learn from people who wait well is to *get ready*. For Anna, that meant fasting and praying, exercises for the body and soul, to prepare her to recognize and welcome her savior. For Simeon, it meant living a life that was "righteous and devout." Paying attention to his spiritual well-being and to the way he acted so that others would see and follow his example. For Ruby Bridges, it meant going above and beyond to get the education she needed to live a whole lifetime of trying to change the system so that other children wouldn't need to suffer the racism that she did. Life is a little like a TSA line: it goes more smoothly if you take your laptop and toiletries out of your bag *before* you get to the conveyor belt. And if we're going to need some work in our hearts, or minds, or bodies to be prepared to receive whatever good we're waiting for, it makes sense to do that while we're waiting.

So what preparation do you need to be doing right now? What will make you best able to receive the redemption you are waiting for? How can you *get ready*?

The third thing I think we learn from good wait-ers is that sometimes the best kind of waiting is when we don't wait. There is a way of living in which we realize that the fullness of our redemption hasn't happened, and yet that we can *be the redemption* in some measure. I think this is part of what Anna and Simeon were doing as prophets of their time - signalling to the rest of a waiting people that there was still hope, that their salvation was on the way, that God still cared about them even when it seemed like they would wait forever. And Ruby Bridges certainly has not been waiting around for someone else to get on board and bring racial equality; she's doing that work, making sure that fewer and fewer kids have to experience the discrimination she did, creating a world where someday they won't have to wait for justice.

So how can you live in a way that brings hope to other waiting people? How might you alter the patterns of your life so that they reflect the good things you're waiting for? How will you *be the redemption* you long to see?

Waiting rarely feels comfortable, but it doesn't have to be a time when we go stagnant or apathetic. We can watch and wait actively, with focus and determination. Show up. Get ready. Be the redemption you wait for. And we might surprise ourselves by how little we feel like we've been waiting at all.