

Luke 2:40-52 – Patience

It's finally over—the year 2020—and we can only pray that 2021 will be nothing like it. That's what we're waiting for, hoping for, praying for.

Let me tell you a story about someone who felt all those things and a lot more.

That's how Peggy Harris felt for sixty-eight years. You see, Peggy married the love of her life, Billie Harris, just six weeks before he was deployed overseas in World War II. Billie was a fighter pilot. On July 17, 1944, he took to the skies for a mission over Nazi-occupied northern France. He never returned.

That summer of 1944, Peggy received word that Billie was missing in action. Then she received news that he was alive and on his way home. Then she was told that he was killed in action and his remains were at a cemetery in Europe. Then the cemetery location was changed. Then she heard that the grave might not be his at all. So Peggy waited. She waited for months; and then for years. She wrote her congressman to try to find out whatever happened to Billie. She waited and waited and wrote and wrote again and again--for over 60 years!

A few years ago, Billie's cousin decided to see what he could do for Peggy. He made a request for his military records and he found the answer. Billie was lost in action on that fateful day in 1944. He was buried at one of the most famous military cemeteries ever: in Normandy, France, with a white marble cross marking his grave. Finally, he was found!

And Peggy waited the whole time. She never remarried. She loved Billie. Peggy sent flowers ten times every year to adorn his grave. Cemetery officials say that she was the last widow to visit her loved one there. And Peggy was glad to do it. After sixty-eight years of wondering and waiting, she finally received her answer.

I wonder if you feel a bit like Peggy Harris. Maybe you haven't been waiting for sixty-eight years, but your wait feels long and it feels difficult. It's not merely causing you anxiety; it's literally taking the life out of you. You wonder if you can make it any further.

But it's so difficult, isn't it? Being patient is not our natural persuasion. We're not willing waiters. We want to get on with it. We want life to move forward right now. We want instant results. We're a microwave world and a hurried, harassed culture. Our desire is to get to the next step right now. The faster it can happen, the better it is, we think. And much of the world meets our need for speed.

Now, with certain things, fast can be innovative; it can be good. But our impatience can also lead to a life of pain. Especially when life slows down on its own terms, or when life spins out of our control. Then our speedy expectations can lead to unbearable heartache and grief.

And if you're honest with me today, when you are waiting anxiously, it's often because you are disappointed with God's response. Maybe you don't think He is concerned about you at all. So, like we all tend to do, we take matters into our own hands, we make our own plans--doing things our way for immediate answers and satisfaction. Often, that temporary solution gives way to even more waiting, more disappointment, and more anxiety.

Waiting anxiously becomes a sin when we give in to that temptation that we somehow care about our life more than God does. It's exactly the opposite. God loves you with an eternal love. Whatever is happening in your life today it can't separate us from His love, His grace, His power.

You see, Jesus understands what it means to wait. Let me ask you this question. What did Jesus do most in His time on earth? Miracles? Teaching? Preaching? No. He waited most of all. In Luke, chapter two, we hear the twelve-year-old Jesus was eager to start His ministry--so eager that He even appears to forget about His own family for a time! Our text tells us: **"And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in**

Jerusalem. His parents did not know it ... they began to search for him ... After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."

Jesus caused quite a bit of distress for his mom and dad. But as the Son of God on a mission to seek and save the lost, He couldn't hold back. He felt the urgency of His important purpose. And even at twelve years old, His listeners were amazed at His comments and His answers. You can't blame Mary and Joseph for being in distress. You can hear it in Mary's voice. It says: **His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."**

But Jesus replied with eagerness: **"Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"**

Jesus' parents didn't understand what He was telling them at the moment. He was aware, He was ready, but even Jesus knew that, instead of starting His ministry right then and there, He needed to wait. So Luke tells us: **"And he went down with them, came to Nazareth and was submissive to his parents. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and with man."**

So Jesus waited. He waited for twelve years before He had a chance to go to the temple. He got a taste of His ministry during those few days in Jerusalem, but then He had to wait again. It would be another eighteen years before Jesus started His ministry at age 30.

If you've been waiting for a long time, you're not alone. For most of His life, Jesus waited. Yes, He was eager. Yes, He had a deep and abiding desire to do the Father's work of redeeming and restoring the world. Yes, He was passionate about His mission that would involve the sacrifice of His life for the sake of all. But even He, who came in your place for your salvation; even He had to wait for the proper time.

Please be encouraged by this. Please hear that Jesus understands your restlessness, your fear, your feelings of helplessness, and your downheartedness. He gets it. He knows what it's like to wait. But He also provides a path through waiting just for you. I call it Christ's secret path to patience, in plain sight for all to see.

Our solution to waiting seems always to be, "Oh, Lord, give me the answer right now." Even with patience, we tend to pray: "Lord, give me patience, and give it to me now!" Jesus' focus was different. His concern was about the things of God always and being prepared for the answers that were to come, no matter the wait.

For Him, the key in all things was to always be fed and nourished by God's Word. His visit to the temple in Jerusalem reflected Jesus' ongoing immersion in the Word of God. Do you remember how He quoted God's Word when He was tempted by the devil at the beginning of His ministry? Jesus heard and He learned the Scriptures. These became His firm foundation and an important tool to face adversity--including the challenge of waiting.

If you want to wait effectively, you need a steady diet of God's Word. Remember, the Bible is not just another book; it's living, it's active, it's precious wisdom, reliable promises from God Himself. God's Word refreshes your soul and it brings you new life. It is essential to making the long journey of life as a person who waits. When you feel panicky or forgotten, God's Word steadies you and gives you a bigger picture for that perspective. It reminds you of God's faithfulness and fills you with a supernatural peace. It's a key to waiting out anything effectively.

Second, when it comes to patience, Jesus sought the company of others. When He was twelve years old, He went to the Temple. His presence in His Father's house meant being in the company of fellow believers for learning, for encouragement. God's house, His Church, is a place where believers gathered around His Word, sharing, learning, serving in the power that only He can provide. You weren't ever meant to be alone!

And, finally, third, Jesus devoted Himself to prayer as He waited. We hear about Jesus' practice of prayer in Mark, chapter one: **Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.**

If you're in the position of waiting, prayer is essential. Prayer is when you bring your burdens and struggles to God. You cast your cares on Him. If you don't, you'll end up carrying them around with you. And while God may not give you what you want immediately, He is there with you always, sustaining you as you walk the road of your challenge.

The Word of God, the company of other believers, and the gift of prayer: all these blessings center on one thing: being in relationship with your Savior Jesus, to receive and to share His gifts. You grow in patience by God Himself growing it in you and through you. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit as He lives in you and works in you through His Word. Jesus, who suffered all on the cross, who suffered the eternal anxiety of being separated from the Father because of our sin, His life, His death, and resurrection, they are proof that in faith, waiting on God, waiting with God, and waiting for God; it's always worth the wait!

Isaiah, chapter 40, brings some of the most compelling encouragement, then, for our patience. To the burdened and struggling listener who was waiting for God's restoration, the prophet proclaimed: Have you not known? Have you not heard? **The LORD is an everlasting God ... He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, young men shall fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint.** (Isaiah 40:28-31)

That's the Gospel power for patience in this life laid out for all to see! It's the promise that God will be faithful to you through it all. His promises will always be fulfilled for you; maybe not in this day or that, but ultimately in the joy and promise of an eternal life with Him.

God's promises are the power to live boldly in His grace right now and because you know that no matter what is happening in your life at this moment, you are secure in God's hands because of Jesus' work for you on the cross.

I know it's weary to wait. I know that circumstances can seem overwhelming. So, this year, do you find yourself searching and waiting? Then take Jesus' example to heart. Let the things of God be central to your life, let the Good News of Jesus Christ, the power of His Gospel, fill you with the patience that comes in knowing that God cares for you always, He is with you, and through it all, waiting on Him, with Him, and through Him, is a wait that is worth it for you and for those you love. Here's to a Blessed New Year to you always in Him.