

New Beginnings in Our Spiritual Home

I clipped the article out of the paper months ago. Did you see it? Interview with an old man in New York City: "The whole thing is rotten . . ." He tapped his cane against the walls and ceiling of an old, decaying synagogue, Lower East Side of the city. Morris Weiser. Retired butcher. Survivor of the Janowska concentration camp in Poland, as a child. Though his poor synagogue has few worshippers now, Morris Weiser has put all his savings - to keep his synagogue, his Spiritual Home, alive.

"When God saved me from Hitler, I promised to do something for God, in whatever country I came to live. Yes, I'm broken down and old, like this old building. But someday, SOME-day, there will be a LOT of Jews here!"

Morris Weiser. Does what he can, waits with hope. An old Jew, in his Spiritual Home, expecting, expecting something extra-ordinary. From God.

In the scene Luke describes, two old Jews -- Simeon, Anna, holding on to their hope. Waiting. Expecting. Old Jews in their Spiritual Home, expecting something extraordinary, from God. Like Morris Weiser, they did all in their power, did what they could, while they waited, expecting

It's never easy to wait, for Important Things: For the arrival of loved ones, coming on a long and dangerous trip; For morning, the sunrise, to relieve a sleepless night; Waiting for a healing word, after a bitter argument; Waiting for labor, hard labor, to be completed, the child born at last; For dying, waiting for dying, to be done.

It's never easy, to wait, for Important Things. But hard as they are, those aren't the hardest. No, no.

It's hardest of all, to wait for God. Not many can sustain the difficult balance, holding onto: Action – and – Hope. Not many can endure, endure the long, dark hours.

Since the demands of waiting for God are so great: it's always tempting to change it, to something less. Some: change waiting for God, into passivity. "We're waiting on God. Nothing can be done until God comes and acts!"

Nations fight. Countless people killed. "Nothing we can do about it. We're waiting for God to bring peace." Passive. Doing nothing. Passive.

"The poor are always with us. Nothing we can do about the poor. We're waiting for God to come and take care of the poor."

"Sure. There's a certain percentage of innocent people in our prisons. Sad but true. Nothing we can do about it. We'll wait for God to set things right."

It's tempting to be passive. Inactive. Do nothing. While waiting for God. The Prince of Darkness LOVES THAT. But waiting for God is NOT like sitting in a darkened theater, waiting for the drama to begin

Waiting for God is more like waiting for Honored Guests to arrive at our home. There's much work to be done! Everything's to be made ready. Anticipation. So MUCH to be done, in the meantime.

Fifty years ago, I was in junior high in Northern Virginia. I delivered the morning paper. I kept reading about ministers arguing about something called "Civil Rights." White ministers were telling a colored minister in Alabama to wait, to be more patient, for fair and equal treatment. They advised him to "slow down" his movement for Justice, for Civil Rights.

Later, I was in high school, when I saw on our black and white TV news: Police on horses, swinging clubs at our own citizens, beating people, hitting them hard on the head, knocking them down, people who were walking peacefully.

Men with fire hoses: high pressure water, knocking down adults and children, who were walking, walking peacefully, for Civil Rights.

I was in college when I read what that black minister in Alabama had written, writing back to the white ministers who'd asked him to "be patient, slow down, you're in too much of a hurry." I read his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in which Dr. King said that his brother clergy misunderstood God's Time and human activity. He wrote:

"Human progress is NOT inevitable. Human progress comes through the timeless efforts of people serving as co-workers with God. We must USE time, knowing that: The time is ALWAYS Ripe, to do Right!"

Dr. King was raised in the Heart of Christian Faith. As a child, he was dedicated and raised up in the heart of a congregation, his Spiritual Home. Martin King knew that complete Justice must await the coming of God. But -- in the meantime, in the meantime -- we must do all we can!

Like Dr. King: Morris Weiser was not passive. Simeon and Anna were not passive, while they waited for God. While they waited, expecting New Beginnings, in their Spiritual Home, they did what they could, while they waited.

Joseph and Mary. Young Jewish couple. Observing their religious customs. Devoutly brought their infant to the National Temple. Their Spiritual Home. And -- thirty years later -- their child's teaching and healing would begin to turn the Jewish world upside down!

Luke ties a ribbon on this scene when he writes (verse 40), referring to the young Jesus: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him."

"Awww, how sweet" we think. But Jews? Jews read and hear that verse, they say "Aha !! The exact same thing that was said of young Samuel, raised in the very same Temple" in I Samuel (as elder Craig Thomas read this morning).

Luke is telling us that young Jesus, is the New Samuel! A faithful leader of his people, raised in the heart of our Temple, A leader who will bring us "New Beginnings, in our Spiritual Home!"

Not only Simeon. Not only Anna. Even our storyteller Luke -- is telling us, that (Surprise !) God is about to do something extra-ordinary thru the life of this infant Jesus.

And yet: though many have waited, waited for centuries, for a messiah to come, Jesus' teachings and leadership strategies were NOT what they'd expected.

It's hard, to wait for God. And when we do. Darned if God doesn't surprise us!

We pray for God's inner peace --

And God comes and brings us another struggle.

We pray for God to come, with healing --

And God comes to us at the graveside saying "I am the resurrection and the life"

We pray for God to bring new neighbors to our congregation, here, to grow our church for broader service --

And God comes with new neighbors, yes, but neighbors who are different from us.

We pray for safety for our loved ones in uniform and victory over our enemies --

And God comes to reveal our false idol of Pre-Emptive Violence

It's hard to wait for God. And when we do, God surprises us!

A baby? In the arms of strangers? In a sanctuary? An infant? A sign of hope? A sign of God's redemptive power? Power -- an Infant? Not what we were expecting.

Thirty years later, when this Jesus will lead and teach scripture-based behavior that will cost him his life, most of the people in this scene today, will be dead. Simeon. Anna. Daddy Joseph.

You and I ? We're not likely to live to see OUR hopes fulfilled. And yet , and yet: here in the heart of THIS congregation, in THIS Spiritual Home, New Beginnings are stirring. Can you sense it?

We pray for, and work for: Racial Reconciliation. We pray for, and work for: Food and Clothing and decent Housing for our neighbors, the working poor. We pray for, and work for: Peace, in families, Justice, in cities, Reconciliation, among nations.

Are these prayers likely to be answered, in our lifetime? I don't know. I get older every year. Like Simeon. Like Anna.

I do know: in Jesus, Reconciliation came with Sacrifice. Hope came, with his Demand for Our New Behavior toward the Least, the Last, the Lost.

When we get partial glimpses of the future Justice of God, is it enough?

One homeless family gets job training while sleeping in our classrooms upstairs. Then a job. Then, finally, a decent apartment.

A home health nurse expresses her gratitude to us, five months ago, at this very pulpit, gratitude for the new home she built with some of us working next to her, Saturdays.

These partial glimpses of God's future Justice - are they enough? We may want to see more, than these little bits, in our own time, but ...

Like a baby held high in the feeble arms of an Old Believer in the Jerusalem temple, we see a glimpse of God's future, of all places, HERE, in OUR Spiritual Home. New Beginnings, in our Spiritual Home.

From time to time, when we're patient, and pay attention to what God is doing. We see a glimpse of God's Redemption of the World. Just a glimpse.

It's enough, most days, for me.

? How about you ?

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Luke 2:18-20, 26
I Samuel 2:41-52
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