

## **“Patience is a virtue”**

**Sermon by The Revd Hannah Higginson at All Saints Church Wokingham**

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2019 : Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)**

*Gospel reading – Luke 2:22-40*

I wonder how patient you are? In reflecting on patience, I came across the following story, told by a New York cab driver.

*I arrived at the address and honked the horn. After waiting a few minutes I honked again. Since this was going to be my last ride of my shift I thought about just driving away, but instead I put the car in park and walked up to the door and knocked.. 'Just a minute', answered a frail, elderly voice. I could hear something being dragged across the floor.*

*After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her 90's stood before me. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940's movie.*

*By her side was a small nylon suitcase. The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. All the furniture was covered with sheets.*

*There were no clocks on the walls, no knickknacks or utensils on the counters. In the corner was a cardboard box filled with photos and glassware.*

*'Would you carry my bag out to the car?' she said. I took the suitcase to the car, then returned to assist the woman.*

*She took my arm and we walked slowly toward the curb.*

*She kept thanking me for my kindness. 'It's nothing', I told her.. 'I just try to treat my passengers the way I would want my mother to be treated.'*

*'Oh, you're such a good boy, she said. When we got in the cab, she gave me an address and then asked, 'Could you drive through downtown?'*

*'It's not the shortest way,' I answered quickly..*

*'Oh, I don't mind,' she said. 'I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice.*

*I looked in the rear-view mirror. Her eyes were glistening. 'I don't have any family left,' she continued in a soft voice. 'The doctor says I don't have very long.' I quietly reached over and shut off the meter. 'What route would you like me to take?' I asked.*

*For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she had once worked as an elevator operator.*

*We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband had lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl.*

*Sometimes she'd ask me to slow in front of a particular building or corner and would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.*

*As the first hint of sun was creasing the horizon, she suddenly said, 'I'm tired. Let's go now'. We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a low building, like a small convalescent home, with a driveway that passed under a portico.*

*Two orderlies came out to the cab as soon as we pulled up. I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already seated in a wheelchair.*

*'How much do I owe you?' She asked, reaching into her purse.*

*'Nothing,' I said*

*'You have to make a living,' she answered.*

*'There are other passengers,' I responded.*

*Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held onto me tightly.*

*'You gave an old woman a little moment of joy,' she said. 'Thank you.'*

*I squeezed her hand, and then walked into the dim morning light.. Behind me, a door shut. It was the sound of the closing of a life..*

*I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly lost in thought. For the rest of that day, I could hardly talk. What if that woman had gotten an angry driver, or one who was impatient to end his shift? What if I had refused to take the run, or had honked once, then driven away?*

*On a quick review, I don't think that I have done anything more important in my life.*

*What a challenging story, showing us the importance of taking time to pause, to slow down in life, to be patient rather than rushing on.*

*We do not know how or when God promised Simeon that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah, but the suggestion is that he has been waiting patiently for a long time.*

*Simeon we are told is devout and righteous, he is faithful to God and clearly spends time in prayer and study – when God calls he is ready to respond. He recognises the promptings of God's spirit, urging him to go to the temple, and he is able to not only recognise Jesus for who he is, but also to speak wise and prophetic words about him.*

As Christians we are called to faithfulness and patience. And what an incredible example we find in Simeon. What if Simeon had been impatient and not trusted God's timings? What if he had failed to notice the Spirit's promptings to go to the temple that day?

We are called to be faithful and patient in response to God. Our faith is full of promises and realities yet to be realised: God's promise of forgiveness, of eternal life, of the restoration and renewal of this world, of the new heaven and new earth, of new bodies for each of us. As we read in Hebrews, 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (ch11:1). We trust in God that he will keep his promises to us, often in the face of difficulties and trials. Being faithful and trusting can be hard but we should be encouraged, Jesus himself said, 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe' (Jn20:29).

And as if Simeon isn't enough of an inspiration for us— we then encounter Anna. Anna is actually the only woman in the New Testament directly described as a prophet. And although Luke doesn't pen her words, she is portrayed in a most favourable light. Anna, we are told, never left the temple but worshipped there day and night in prayer and fasting. She has had a hard life, with the death of her husband, leaving her not only bereaved but also as a widow in the first century, life would not have been easy. Anna shows, like Simeon, incredible faithfulness and patience in serving God; like Simeon, Anna is very much open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There are times when we witness God's incredible love in our lives, when we catch glimpses of his power and authority, times when we are reminded of God's faithfulness to us – like that day in the temple. But let's be honest, most of the time we continue through life without those moments, we struggle through the suffering and the mess. We can feel discouraged, alone, and like we have very little faith at all. But if today's reading is a reminder of the incredible faithfulness and patience to which we are called, then it is also a reminder of God's faithfulness to us. God has been faithful throughout history. He was faithful to his people the Jews in his guidance and by never abandoning them. He sent them the promised Messiah. And God was faithful to the world, to the earth and to humanity, in sending Jesus to bring healing, restoration, and reconciliation.

The story that I opened with is a reminder to us on this celebration of Christ's presentation in the temple of the importance of patience. Without it, it would be so easy to miss those little moments of God; so easy to overlook the needs of others; easy to miss the holy family arriving in the temple - one of many, many families over the years. As we reflect on our own need for patience and for faithfulness, let us be encouraged by Simeon and Anna that, like them, we might draw close to God and be

open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And let us be inspired as we reflect on the faithfulness of God to us; God's love for us and his faithfulness in keeping his promises.