P.A.X.: Prayer Awakens Expectation Memory Verse: Psalm 5:3

Nov. 27th 2022 Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7

SLIDE 1: TITLE

 This week marks our entrance into the season of Advent. Now this may be a little known fact, but Advent is different from Christmas. No one has informed the stores and radio stations about this, but Christmas has not come yet, and will not come for another 28 days. This makes our celebration of Advent a uniquely Christian thing. It’s weird. Why not just jump right in? Why not engage in the holiday season for as long as possible? Well what if I told you that it is good for us to wait. All of our lives are characterized by instant this and same day shipping that. We are surrounded by fast food and goods and services that promise us convenience. Advent makes no such claims…Advent is about waiting in expectation.

**SLIDE 2: We live in faith.**

 As I have already stated, we Christians have a rather odd outlook. We live in faith…that’s a future oriented word isn’t it? We have faith in what we cannot see….faith in the work of a Savior performed for us thousands of years ago, but it is also faith in the future return of that same Savior to come and claim his bride.

**SLIDE 3: We live in hope.**

We live in hope, hope that the death and resurrection of Jesus is sufficient for providing salvation to sinful mankind…but also hope in the future of eternal life with him.

**SLIDE 4: We live in expectation.**

We live in expectation…we want to see God move among us…we want to see His kingdom come on this earth, even right here in this church! We look to our own future with great expectation.

 It’s a peculiar way to live. It’s much easier and more practical to live in the here and now. Take each day as it comes. Live in the moment. Even Jesus himself tells us not to worry about tomorrow, because today brings with it enough worries of it’s own. But that is just the point isn’t it? Living in faith and hope and expectation removes all anxieties about the future. It places all of our tomorrows into the capable and loving hands of Jesus.

**SLIDE 5: Picture of Simeon**

As we begin our journey of waiting, I want to tell you the story of an old man named Simeon. His story is found in Luke chapter 2. The main thing to know about Simeon is that he loved God and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact he had a special relationship with God. This relationship began with trust. Simeon was an Israelite. He was part of God’s chosen people, a son of Abraham but even more than that, Simeon’s heart was sold out to God. He believed all those old, old stories of God’s redemption and mighty power. He did not just read through the Jewish scriptures, he experienced them. He rejoiced when God saved and he wept over his own people’s obstinance and unwillingness to live into God’s promises. He felt the sting of God’s decree to exile his chosen people and destroy the sacred city of Jerusalem. Sure, it had all happened long ago in the past, but Simeon knew, he understood that the story of Israel and his own story were one and the same. And now, as he looked out of his window, he was able to see every day his own kin harassed and unfairly treated by those Roman soldiers. Rome was certainly in control, or at least it seemed that way. See, Simeon knew something, he believed something that no one else seemed to care much about. But Simeon had come across passages in his studies, passages like the one we read today, passages like Isaiah chapter 9. Simeon had read words like: those walking in darkness have seen a great light, you have broken the rod of the oppressor, for unto us a child is born who shall be called Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace and his kingdom shall be established in justice and righteousness. Simeon was odd and he was odd because he determined to steadfastly wait for God to bring about these things. Be believed Isaiah spoke the trustworthy word of God and he trusted God to keep the promises he had made. So despite what sort of travesties Simeon witnessed outside of his window, in hope and expectation, he would wait. He would devote himself to prayer and wait patiently for God’s will to be unveiled.

 One day as Simeon finished up his morning prayer time, he sensed that God had something more for him. So instead of closing with the usual “Amen”, Simeon decided to sit quietly. Then in the silence, God spoke. It was hard for Simeon to describe the experience. He may have heard something audibly, or maybe it was just some sort of internal thought process. However it came to him, Simeon know that God was speaking. God revealed to him that indeed the promises he had read and trusted in were true! Not only that, God was going to allow Simeon, before he died, to see with his own eyes the One in whom all these promises would come true. The Messiah himself!

 Simeon was thrilled! He felt like a young man again! He loved God and God’s people and was so grateful to have this opportunity to behold the chosen One of God. So he went about his days with a new spring in his step.

**Slide 6: Simeon and Jesus**

 Finally, the day came when the Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple and there he saw a small child, with his parents who were offering some pigeons as a sacrifice. The baby boy looked to be about a month old, 40 days exactly as Simeon figured this would have marked the end of this new mother’s time of uncleanness. Well, this was nothing new, in fact, it was so ordinary that Simeon had to question if this was really where God was leading him. Would the chosen Messiah appear so normal? Would he blend in so well?

 Yet, in faith, Simeon steps out to further investigate. He takes the baby into his arms and although there is no halo about his head or specific radiance of any kind, Simeon know without a doubt that the child he held was none other than the Messiah promised by God. Out of a grateful heart Simeon offers a prayer of thanks that also doubles as a prophetic word spoken over the boy:

**SLIDE 7: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”**

“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

 Simeon’s great hope has been put into action. He has witnessed the glory of God for himself. God has fulfilled his personal promise and now Simeon can die a happy man. But Simeon has more to say about this Jesus. He speaks to his mother saying, “This child is destined to cause the fall and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign which will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul also.”

 And Simeon departs with his heart at peace knowing full well that because of this baby, God will see through all the plans and promises that He has made.

 But imagine the story Simeon has to tell his friends and neighbors as he returns home. He was brimming with hope and excitement and yet what is there to communicate to people? Can you imagine this old man waltzing down the street shouting, “I’ve seen him! I’ve seen him! Messiah has come! God’s salvation is here!” “Really Simeon, what do you mean? Tell me what happened?” “I saw him in the temple! He is a baby and I held him in my arms.” Okay, Simeon, okay, that is quite the story. Have a nice day.” Remember, Simeon was an odd guy…he functioned out of a great hope in God’s promises, he lived in expectation.

 To any who saw Jesus at 40 days old, he would have appeared as any other baby…drooling, cooing, crying, needy as ever. But Simeon was able to see through a different set of eyes. His devout faith informed him that this child was much more than another baby taking part in a ritual at the temple. This was Jesus, the glory of Israel and the light to the Gentiles. Jesus, who would be the falling and rising of many, who would reveal the hearts of mankind.

**SLIDE 8: This is the power of those who live a life of prayer.**

 This is the power of those who live a life of prayer. Like Simeon, should we choose to be pray-ers, we will be odd in this world. We won’t be caught up in the cares and distractions of the day, we will be looking to the promised future. We will not be anxious or distraught about current affairs, we will devoutly look forward in expectation.

 Like Simeon, we will be able to see Christ when we shows up! John’s gospels tells us that the Word, that is Jesus, became flesh and dwelt among us. He was born as one of us. He took on this frail human form and not as some version of God wearing a human costume, but literally from the inside out, from the womb of a flesh and blood woman comes a baby…a completely normal baby. Isaiah 53 says of this coming Messiah that he had no form of majesty about him, no desirable appearance. Jesus was a completely normal baby and yet, through his expectant faith, Simeon was able to see Jesus for who He really was. When we pray expectantly, we too will be able to find Christ in the normal happenings of the day. We too will be able to encounter Jesus while everyone else seems oblivious. Christ is present with us right here and right now, but we need a little help to find him…we need the eyes that faith provides.

**SLIDE 9: TITLE SLIDE**

 Prayer awakens expectation. That is what we want this Advent season to be all about. This is a time of waiting, a time in which we surrender our own time frame, our own agenda, our own plans and turn to the promises that God has made. We believe these promises have been fulfilled through the birth, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but yet we still struggle. We still feel the sting of suffering and pain. We are keenly aware that the Prince of Peace has yet to fully bring his rule to bear on the nations of this world. But it is coming. We believe, as odd as it may seem, that it is coming. And so we wait. But not in the sense of sitting around twiddling our thumbs or paging through old magazines. Our is an active waiting. We wait and we pray! And as we live into prayer, we find that those promise of God inch closer and closer to us. What used to seem impossibly far away now has a sense of imminence. As we live into prayer, expectation begins to awaken in us and the Holy Spirit begins to give us eyes to see Jesus in our very midst, indeed Jesus in our very hearts.

 But it is not Christmastime yet. But it will come, and Jesus’ second return is not yet, but it will come. Pastor and author A.W. Tozer wrote much on the subject of prayer. I wanted to share with you some of his wisdom on the matter. One thing he makes clear, “Prayer”, he writes, “cannot be taught, it can only be done.”

**SLIDE 10: “cannot be taught, it can only be done.”**

I think many of us wallow in this sort of swamp of inadequacy. We don’t really know how to pray, we don’t know what to pray, we don’t know how to approach the issue. One thing we do know is I certainly can’t pray like so and so over there. Well, let me assure you, there is no bad prayer. Our heavenly Father loves to here from us from right where we are, straight from the heart, no pretense required. You do not have to learn how to pray, you merely need to pray. Tozer aligns himself with Simeon when he says, “Helplessness united with faith produces prayer.”

**SLIDE 11: “Helplessness united with faith produces prayer.”**

Simeon could not do anything about the state of his surroundings. He lived under Roman rule. He knew that should not be the case, but what could he do? Simeon was helpless! But he had faith. These two ingredients mixed together to produce a prayer life that could not overcome by the state of this world. This Advent I want to encourage you to embrace your own helplessness. We would like to think we can change the world, but I don’t believe we possess such power. We would like to think we can unroll a strategic plan and get our church growing and see people in our community come to know Jesus…but we are absolutely unable to make that happen. But we have faith that it could. We have faith that it will! Not by might or by power, not by well laid plans or super fun ministries, but by the Holy Spirit of God. Our helplessness combined with our faith drives us to be people of prayer. And finally, Tozer says simply, “Pray till you pray.”

**SLIDE 12: “Pray till you pray.”**

Keep at it, don’t give up. Maybe it feels uncomfortable, or weird or unnatural. That is okay. That is as it should be. We are all scaling a mountain when it comes to prayer. None of us have made it to the top, but we remember what Simeon knew so well…that God has come down to meet us. Christ is here among us! We don’t have any hoops to jump through or rituals to perform…Emmanuel, God is with us! So pray until you pray.

 We need to be a people of prayer. We need to awaken expectation here within our church family. The only way to do that is through prayer. Together, we need to seek the Lord in prayer. And so here at Forest Hills, we are unrolling a new plan which is the farthest thing from innovative or new…it’s the oldest trick in the book, we are asking you all to join a prayer team, or a P.A.X. team as we call them.

**SLIDE 13: P.A.X.**

 This is not a grow group as grow groups focus on discussion and strengthening relationships. We need those too but our P.A.X. teams are going to be exclusively focused on prayer. Each team will have a leader and a centralized list of items to lift up in prayer. As each team meets they can add any additional request to that list, a short scripture passage will be read and then the group is off praying!

 P.A.X. teams meet throughout the week, during the day, during the evening so everyone can make it to a least one. Some of the teams meet weekly and some every other, but every team will be focused on prayer and awakening our expectation as a church. This is not the work of a few pray-ers…I believe the Holy Spirit wants to make pray-ers out of all of us. So take a look at the calendar of current teams that are meeting and join one! Contact the team leader or just show up! Or if you would like to start a team during a time that is not listed, that is welcomed as well and I would love to have a conversation with you about that.

**SLIDE 14: Turn our waiting into a time of prayer**

 Church, we have just entered Advent. A time of waiting, a time of expectancy. Let’s let Simeon be our guide, and turn our waiting into a time of prayer.