

Welcome

I think if I could have one superpower, it might be montaging. I doubt Rocky was the first movie to have a montage in it, but it's become the most famous example. Sports movies in general are a great source of montages.

Just in case you're not familiar with the word, a montage is that part in a movie where music plays while the main character does the thing they're trying to get good at. In boxing movies, it's the boxing training. In the first couple of shots of the montage, they're slow, or they're tired, or they can't get up all the stairs. Then there's a bunch of shots of training, and by the end of the montage, they're strong, fast, whatever.

Can you imagine if you had montaging as a superpower? Something breaks at your house and you sigh: oh man, now I have to call a plumber! Not if you can montage - play an upbeat song and a few minutes later, BOOM master plumber. What's that? You need your brakes changed? No idea how to do that... hold on: MONTAGE! Oh there's a 5K this weekend? Hm I haven't run down the stairs in a month or more. Gimme a sec - MONTAGE!

Montaging would be almost as good as being plugged into the Matrix. After all, I've always wanted to know kung fu. But I took karate lessons for like a month and we never learned to break one cinder block by punching. But if I could montage...

You know why movies use montages, right? It's for the same reason none of us is a master of plumbing and brake pads and 5Ks and kung fu - because mastering a skill takes a lot of time, and it's not glamorous. It's not fun. It's not exciting. It doesn't make for good cinema.

And... it's not very exciting in real life either. To be where we want to be takes commitment. It takes ongoing effort. There's no such thing as a montage in real life.

That's why I love that opening song, "Diamond". The singer has that same fear I do: that when it comes time for the title fight, I won't be ready, because I've only put in 'montage training time'. I can't be ready for the big day without lots and lots of preparation for that big day. Real training, not just montage training.

So since it's a new year, we're going to spend today imagining what God has in store for us. What 'big days' God has in our future. And we're going to ask what we need to do in this new year to be ready for that future.

Today is the 12th Day of Christmas, the culmination of our long feast. Will you stand and celebrate with me?

Message

The first Sunday of the calendar year is always a bit of a strange one for us. It's the beginning of a new calendar year, but it's also the end of the 12 day Feast of Christmas, where we celebrate the end of our Advent waiting.

So today, we're going to conclude our Advent and Christmas series by looking ahead, which is appropriate. During Advent this year, we were in a series called Christmas is for Dreamers. We explored how Israel's ancient prophets helped God's people anticipate the Messiah's coming, the coming we celebrate as the first Christmas.

But our Advent and Christmas celebrations aren't only looking back. They're not even *mainly* looking back. We know that, because Jesus has come, God is with us. And we know Jesus is coming back. So we've been asking hard questions: what are we hoping for? How are we hoping for it?

Today, we recognize that we live in a world of unfulfilled dreams. Not all our hopes have been realized - in large part because Jesus has not returned yet. So we ask that question: how do we wait for the end?

This is the hope we explored during Advent, the hope that insists God is faithful, even though we don't see evidence of God's action.

[Scripture Slide] We're going to explore a story from the earliest days of Jesus' life, only a week after his birth. Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to be circumcised.

They're going to encounter a man named Simeon. As you'll see, God told Simeon at some point that he wouldn't die until he saw the Messiah. And Simeon is an old man.

Which begs some questions for me: how did God tell Simeon? Did he have a dream, like Joseph and the other prophets? Was it an audible voice like the judge Samuel heard? And how old was Simeon when he heard this promise? A child? A teen? Was he married? Did he think maybe *his* kid would be the Messiah? Or was this something that happened later in his life?

We can't be exactly sure - the text leaves out all those details. But we can know some things:

If Simeon is in his 60s or 70s - a reasonable assumption given his words we'll read in a moment, then he's lived through tumultuous years. He was born into the Hasmonean kingdom, when Israel was independent, ruled by Jewish king-priests. But by the time Simeon was born, the kingdom was falling apart, the king undermined by his brother, who was backed by the Parthian Empire. Essentially, Israel in Simeon's day looked a lot like Vietnam or Afghanistan during the Cold War, when the US backed one side and China or Russia backed the other. Israel was a pawn between the Roman and Parthian Empires. Rome eventually won out, which was how Herod the Great came to be king of the Jews.

So: civil war and political unrest for the first thirty years of Simeon's life. For the last forty years or so, Herod has kept peace in Israel, but he's far from a godly king. He worships Rome and the emperor

Caesar Augustus. For a faithful man like Simeon, that was a painful reality to live in. But what kept him clinging to hope was that promise: You won't die before you see the Messiah.

Through civil war: this will get better.

Through the rule of an evil king: this will get better.

God hasn't abandoned God's people. God isn't finished with you, Simeon.

So with that in mind, put yourself in Simeon's place as this story unfolds:

Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD." So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" -- Luke 2:22-32

[Image: Simeons Song] Can we take just a moment to enjoy this scene? I mean *anyone* who's ever had to wait for something knows this feeling. Isn't this in part why we love the wait for Christmas so much? The anticipation that resolves in the receiving of the gift? And here is Simeon, who's waited decades for God's promise to be fulfilled, and now he's holding the Christ child in his arms.

Wow.

So here's the big question: how do we get to be like Simeon? What made him the kind of person who made it to this place?

There's one little verse that caught my eye when I was studying his story: **That day the Spirit led him to the Temple.**

Apparently, Simeon wasn't at the Temple every day. In fact, it's not even clear the Spirit told him he would meet the Messiah at the Temple (though, in general, it wouldn't have been a bad assumption).

No, Simeon was just going about his business, living his life, and the Spirit said, "Simeon: go to the Temple today."

So Simeon went. And he was able to spot the Messiah, a child of these two poor parents, bringing their infant son to be circumcised.

Friends, I find this *very* interesting. Precisely because we don't know the details of Simeon's story.

I can't help but wonder: how many years did Simeon have to wait? How many *decades* between the time the Spirit told him he would meet the Messiah and the day the Spirit said, "Go to the Temple"?

Ten years? Twenty? Fifty?

Which begs the question of me: how long would I wait for God to fulfill that promise? After all, it's very possible Simeon waited for God's promise longer than I've been *alive*. And I'm not a patient person - is any of us, in this push-button age?

Here's what that tells me about Simeon: he was a man who remained in God, who attended to his spiritual life, for a whole lot of years. And, if we made a movie of Simeon's life, that part would be a montage. We'd get that powerful scene in his youth, when God makes him that promise. And then we'd get a song and clips of him worshipping, praying, reciting scripture. Keeping Sabbath. Fasting and feasting. Meditating on Scripture. For years. Decades.

Then we'd get the scene of *the day*. The day the Spirit finally said, "Go, Simeon."

It'd be a montage because spiritual formation isn't sexy. It's not exciting or thrilling.

But if we want to be the person who's ready when God calls, we have to put in the time to being formed.

Simeon did.

We can imagine his story playing out another way, can't we? Where he just sort of starts skipping a day here and there, where his spiritual practices fall by the wayside? He doesn't *quit* them, not exactly. He just gets busy with the cares of day-to-day life.

And before you know it, it's been a few months since he prayed. The scriptures are getting fuzzy. He's more tuned into the news coming out of Jerusalem than he is what God is saying to him. Months turn to years turn to decades and then that day comes and the Spirit says, "Go, Simeon."

But Simeon doesn't hear. Because the Spirit's voice is still and small, and it's been ages since Simeon slowed down enough to listen. So he goes about his normal business. The holy family comes to the Temple and leaves without encountering him.

And however much later it is Simeon passes from the Earth, he lies on his deathbed, thinking back to that day as a young man when God made him a promise. He wonders why God was unfaithful, why God didn't fulfill that promise.

But God wasn't unfaithful. Simeon tried to get by with montage spiritual formation, and you just can't learn to hear the Spirit with montage training time.

Friends, the life of faith isn't a magic spell. God isn't a Santa Clause who rewards you for being good. God isn't a genie who grants wishes as long as we call them prayers.

Faith is a relationship. God invites us to grow, to become new. So the question before us as we face 2020 is: will we be active participants in this relationship? Will we make space in our lives for what God is calling us to? Or will we let our spiritual formation fall by the wayside, ignore it and forget about it until we can't hear the Spirit's voice?

[Catalyst Spiritual Practices]

We've spend the Advent season exploring what our hope looks like, and asking God what our part in that future is. Today, as we face a new year together, let's all commit to remain grounded in spiritual formation. Let's commit together to be a people who meets God in prayer, listens to God through Scripture. A people who is generous and who rests, a people who fasts and feasts together!

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] Coming to the table each week is our community practice.

1. Asdf
2. Asdf
3. Asdf
4. Asd

Assignment + Blessing

What spiritual practices is God calling you to in the new year?