

Welcome

We live in a push-button culture. You might recall the Staples commercials of a few years ago featuring the "Easy Button". Press the glowing red button with "EASY" printed in block capital letters and Staples granted your every wish (provided they were office-supply related). What only a few years ago was clever marketing wish-fulfillment has become a near-reality thanks to mega-corporations like Amazon. Amazon's Dash buttons, which began as an April Fools gag, allow us to order everything from laundry detergent to groceries at the push of a button. In Dallas, Amazon features same-day delivery.

We hardly have to wait for anything anymore. Could it really be long until we reach the Star Trek future where we simply ask and our tea, Earl Grey, hot appears in our hand?

Churches have struggled in the Push Button Age. Worshipers see ourselves as consumers seeking to maximize our profit margin. As we shop for the right church, we wonder which will give us the best return on investment (of our time and, less frequently, our tithe monies). We want a push-button God of the sort promised by the inevitable Christian T-shirt that reimagined the Staples button as the Jesus button, complete with the catchphrase "Jesus: it's just that easy."

There's a level on which that is true: God's grace is a free gift to us. We don't have to complete a checklist or go through some sort of self-improvement training regimen for God to love us or to surrender to a relationship with our creator. The beginning of faith is, indeed, that easy.

But saying Yes to Jesus isn't the end of our story. It's the beginning of a journey. This second half of salvation is what theologians call 'sanctification' - it's the process by which God makes us holy.

There's no easy button for sanctification. Transformation takes a lot of patience.

Barbecue has been a guide on my journey of patience.

[[VIDEO](#)]

Low and slow isn't optional, not if you want good barbecue. There's no easy button for barbecue. It requires patience. The same is true of our journey of transformation.

Message

Believe it or not, we're only a couple of weeks from the beginning of Advent! Traditionally, here at Catalyst we've used these four weeks to revisit our core values. A few years ago, our Leadership Team brought new core values to the congregation that we believe better specify who we are and what we're about as a congregation.

They were: Friendship, Diversity, Discipleship and Pilgrim. Over the last couple of years, we've been playing with the wording - especially the last two, since they're still really insider-church language.

So this year, we're going to reintroduce them as: Friendship, Diversity, Transformation and Curiosity. We believe these four words embody who God calls us to be as a congregation and help us look ahead to next year.

We began with Friendship and last week we explored Diversity. Today is all about Transformation - the theological word is Discipleship. It's the question of how we become more like Jesus.

For a lot of churches, 'Discipleship' boils down to an intellectual exercise - learn the Bible really well. Memorize Scripture and be able to quote it often.

Turn with us to [Luke 2](#).

My favorite example in the Bible of a guy who really took following God seriously is Simeon. We don't know exactly how old he was when he met Jesus, but he seems to have been well past middle age, one of the oldest men around. Simeon lived in Jerusalem at the time Jesus was born. He may well have been roughly the same age as Herod the Great, which means Simeon was old enough to see the fall of the Hasmonean dynasty in Israel and the Roman conquest.

Luke tells us Simeon was "righteous and devout" and that he was "looking forward to the consolation of Israel". He packed a lot of meaning into those phrases.

[Timeline 2] The kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonian Empire in 586 BCE. They destroyed Jerusalem, destroyed God's Temple, the house Solomon had built 400 years earlier. The Babylonians fell to the Persians, who were in turn conquered by Alexander the Great. After he died, his three generals divided his massive empire among themselves, and the land God promised to Abraham was ruled by the Ptolemies then the Seleucid dynasty. For 400 years, God's people were ruled over by pagan emperors and kings.

Faithful Jews lived in a state of constant anguish over this. They felt like exiles in their own lands. Even a rebuilt temple couldn't put right that sense of wrong that came from a pagan ruler on the throne of God's people.

In 167 BCE, the reigning emperor desecrated the new temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. The Jewish people were incensed and rebelled, led by Judas Maccabeus and his family. The Hasmonean kingdom lasted for a century, until it fell to infighting and a new king, one named Herod, seized power with the help of Rome. The Hasmonean civil war ended with God's people once again under the rule of pagans.

Simeon likely lived through Herod's wars. He was born into a monarchy that claimed to be divinely appointed but was painfully, obviously human. He watched that frail kingdom fall to pagans. And he waited for God to fulfill the promises God made through the prophets.

How long had Simeon waited, confident and faithful that God wasn't finished with Israel, that Judas Maccabeus wasn't the best God could offer? How many years had he celebrated Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, and prayed with his compatriots that *this* be the year their long, desperate Exile was over? In how many of his daily prayers did Simeon ask God to come back to God's people? How many times did he beg God for freedom, for restoration?

And then, at some point, he received a revelation. How old was he? Young? Middle-aged? Were his children married? Was he praying with a grandchild, or maybe worshiping on the Sabbath? Luke only tells us,

"It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah." (2:26)

How long was the gap between this revelation Simeon received and the fulfillment of that promise? How many years of fasting and prayer and worship and hoping each day that *today* might be the day his people's terrible burden might be lifted?

Before we move on, I want to pause here. In this space of anticipation. The space pitmasters call The Stall. It's easy to freak out here. To give up. But this is where God is really at work. So let's take a moment to respond in faith.

Song

Simeon spends decades faithfully waiting. Then, one day, near the end of his life, the Holy Spirit whispered to Simeon again, saying, "Today you should go to the Temple."

Simeon was "righteous and devout." It's not like he never went to the Temple; he went a lot. But today, something was different. And there, he saw a mother, a father and a child. Were they the only parents there with an infant? Again, that's unlikely, especially with the census swelling Jerusalem as it had. How did Simeon identify these two parents as the parents of the Messiah? The Messiah is David's son, the true heir to God's throne. And these parents are offering turtledoves or pigeons - the offerings of the poor, not royalty.

Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit. Simeon was righteous and devout. Simeon didn't need stars to follow or a chorus of angels to find the Messiah. Simeon has spent his whole life listening to God, growing in love for God, learning the way of God. He knew God well enough to recognize him when he took on flesh and became a powerless baby born to poor parents.

No wonder he scooped Jesus into his arms and began to worship!

"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel." (2:29-32)

Those long years Simeon waited weren't fun years. He agonized, as did all the Jews, that God's chosen people languished under Gentile oppression. But what kept Simeon in prayer, what kept him coming to the Temple, was God's promise: the Messiah is coming. And Simeon will get to see him.

Imagine if Simeon had decided waiting was too hard. Imagine if he had allowed his questions and doubts to get between him and his prayers. Imagine he hadn't spent so much time knowing God more deeply, learning to attend to the still, small whisper of the Holy Spirit.

We can imagine that alternative: that Simeon did not persist in the low and slow work of waiting for God. That he began missing a prayer here and there, that his feet took him perhaps less often to the Temple than before. That his family noted the jaded edge to his voice, the cynical remark every time news of Herod's latest project came. And then the small, quiet voice calls to Simeon – Today is the day! Today God's promise is fulfilled! – but Simeon has forgotten the still, small voice. He doesn't hear, or he chalks it up to childish dreams. Is it possible he could've missed Jesus? Is it possible he wouldn't have even known to go to the Temple that day?

God made a promise to Simeon - that he wouldn't die before he saw the Messiah. But for that promise to be realized required Simeon to participate in his own transformation (or as Paul said, 'work out his salvation'). And thank God Simeon chose to be faithful - he has become a model for all of us of waiting on God.

The same is true of us. God is at work in our world, and has invited us through Jesus to join in that work. Our calling is the same as it has ever been: to be conformed to the image of Jesus, to let Jesus' mind become our mind, to be faithful images of Jesus in the world, for the sake of the world.

The question is: do you have the patience to wait with God?

Do you trust that God is at work, and that our calling is to do the next right thing, and then the next one after that, and then the next one after that?

Communion + Examen

The table isn't glamorous. It's the low and slow work of regular transformation.

How have I made space for the Holy Spirit to transform me?

What has kept me from making space for the Holy Spirit to transform me?

What barriers to the Holy Spirit may exist in this coming season?

How can I make space for the Holy Spirit to transform me this season?

Assignment + Blessing

[\[Video - cutting into the brisket\]](#) — do we want to be THIS kind of people? Are we willing to put in the work?