

# Sermon 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020

Malachi 3.1-5

Luke 2.22-40

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## **Introduction**

- Not long before his death, Henri Nouwen wrote a book called *Sabbatical Journeys*
- And in his final book, Henri Nouwen wrote about some friends of his who were trapeze artists, called the Flying Roudellas
- And talking about their craft the Flying Roudellas told Henri Nouwen there's a special relationship between the flyer and the catcher on the trapeze
- The flyer is the one that lets go, and the catcher is the one that catches
- As the flyer swings high above the crowd on the trapeze, the moment comes when they must let go
- The flyer arcs out into the air, and their job is to remain as still as possible and wait for the strong hands of the catcher to pluck them from the air
- One of the Flying Roudellas told Henri Nouwen, "The flyer must never try to catch the catcher..."
- ...the flyer must wait in absolute trust. The catcher will catch them, but they must wait

## Unexpected Wait

- Have you ever had that experience where you have been waiting for a bus?
- There is no up-to-the-minute electronic update, the scheduled bus has not arrived, and you continue waiting
- You have no idea when the next bus will come along or if a bus will come along at all
- Eventually, you decide to walk or go to the taxi rank...
- ...but then as you walk away and you are some distance from the bus stop, you turn around and the bus has arrived...
- ...and you have missed it – have you ever had that experience?
- This is the unexpected wait and it is frustrating; an expected wait may be inconvenient, but you are expecting it and you know how long to wait
- But the unexpected or undefined wait is...frustrating and there is the temptation to go and do something about it yourself – like walk or catch a taxi
- And this is precisely where we are with the promise through the prophet Malachi
- *“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts”*
- Great! A messenger in whom we delight – bring it on!
- Except to say that Malachi prophesied that promise some 430 years before the messenger came, before Jesus was born

- And for Simeon in our Gospel reading “*It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah*”
- Again great! The Lord’s Messiah who would be the consolation of Israel – bring it on!
- But Simeon in thanksgiving to the Lord asks that he may now depart in peace...
- ...I think Simeon was a very aged man and that he had been waiting for a very long time for that moment
- For the nation of Israel, for Simeon there was the promise but then there was the unexpected wait

## **Unexpected Fulfilment**

- But for both the nation of Israel and Simeon the unexpected wait was only half the problem...
- ...there was also the unexpected fulfilment
- For the nation of Judah, the Southern kingdom of Israel, who first heard the promise of the messenger from the prophecy of Malachi...
- ...they (and all subsequent hearers) would have heard about “*The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight*”
- But what they (and all subsequent hearers) would have been less inclined to hear was
- “*Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those*

*who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me”*

- I mean who would really delight in someone sent to judge you?!
- And Simeon what was his expectation of the “*consolation of Israel...the Lord’s Messiah*”
- Well, I certainly don’t think it was a helpless baby, born to a poor, lowly couple who could only afford the cheap option of two pigeons for the Temple offering
- For both the nation of Israel and Simeon the promise was fulfilled – eventually – but not quite as they had expected

## **Conclusion**

- As we think as Christians of how to engage with our local community, we should be mindful of the nature of promises
- And today’s readings should make us mindful of two things regarding the nature of promises
- The first thing takes us back to the reflection of Henri Nouwen and the flyer and the catcher
- We are the flyer; our role is to wait for the catcher, not to go chasing the hands of the catcher
- How long? Who knows? It will have already felt like a long wait for many of you in this parish – we want growth, we want God’s kingdom to come
- But then I’m sure hanging in the air feels like a very long time for the flyer before the catcher’s strong hands take hold
- So wait we must, even if that wait is unexpected and undefined; we cannot go chasing but must wait for God, the catcher

- The second is that the vision and its fulfilment may be unexpected as well
- We all have some ideas – I hope – of God’s vision (if not then get praying!)
- But let us also look forward to the unexpected and to not be necessarily resistant to the unexpected
- The only person who knew when the promise would be fulfilled and how the promise would be fulfilled was God
- No one knew that the messenger, the Lord’s Messiah, would be God born as a man who had come to die on a Cross
- No one expected that, and the timing was terrible...
- ...but it is because God fulfils His promises at the time He chooses, and in the way that He chooses, that we have the promise of eternal life at all
- And so God will fulfil His promises to us in the vision He gives to us in His timing and in His way
- Our job is to hang in there and wait for the strong hands of the catcher
- Thanks be to God. **Amen.**