

Six years. Six years. That is the average amount of time that a person will spend waiting in their life. We wait an average of six years in our life, which, if you ask the average kid on Christmas morning is about as long as it takes for their parents to wake up and go to the bathroom and get dressed and come out and make coffee so that they can finally open Christmas presents. It feels like it is six years.

There is no wait that feels longer than that time as a kid. Between waking up and seeing presents under the tree and when you're finally able to open them, that wait feels like an eternity. Every second feels like a minute. Every minute feels like an hour. You see the presence.

You already know which of the presents are yours, because while your parents were waking up and getting ready, you or one of your siblings was going around and scouring through the presents to see whose was. Was whose. You have the presence. The gifts are inside of them, waiting to be unwrapped. But they're not yours yet.

You have to wait. At a young age, we learn the joy of waiting. And as we get older, we only learn more about what it means to wait. And most of us, we despise waiting as much today as we did as that kid waiting to open up our presents on Christmas morning. But waiting is a part of our life.

We wait in lines. We wait at lights. We wait at four way stops for people to figure out whose turn it is to go. We wait for replies to our messages. We wait for vacation time to get here.

We wait on hold. We wait for meals. We wait for friends to finally get ready so that we can go out. We wait. We spend a lot of time.

Like I said, six years of our life is spent waiting. And Quentin prayed for the sermon today to be encouraging and inspiring. Warning, this is not gonna be that part. Okay, listen. We spend six months of our life waiting for a red light to turn green.

Like, think about that. That is depressing right there. We spend six months of our life waiting for the red light to turn green so that we. We spend a year of our life waiting for the preacher to make his point. Seems like he just drags on and on.

So let me get to it. Waiting can feel like a big waste of time. Can it? Which is why we don't like it. I think it's one of the reasons why we despise it so much.

And it's one thing if you're waiting for the dryer to stop running so that you can fold the clothes and go to bed. It's One thing if you're waiting on the water to boil so that you can throw in the pasta and cook in it. But it's a whole other thing when. When you are waiting on

God to show up in your life, right? It's a whole other thing when you have been praying and praying and praying for something or for someone and you are waiting for God to move.

That kind of waiting, kind of waiting is hard. And there are some of us that have been waiting for much longer than years for something like that. That kind of waiting makes us wonder, God, what are you up to? Where are you? What are you doing?

That kind of waiting has a way of making us start to lose hope. We don't know if we can keep it up. We don't know if we can continue to wait. We don't know if it's worth continuing to put our trust in the Lord. It's kind of like this lamp.

We light this lamp.

Okay, you know what? I'm just going to go ahead and cancel this illustration. It hasn't worked at all. Oh, wait. Oh, maybe it's up.

Maybe it's coming back. Okay, it's coming back. It's coming back. We'll see. During the 8:00 service, I moved the wick up just a little bit.

And so when I lit it, the flame came up to here, but the wick wasn't actually in the kerosene. And so like two minutes later it went out. And so that was kind of a bummer, but it's kind of like this lantern. Okay, back to this. We light this wick, and as long as it has the fuel to sustain it, it's going to stay lit.

Like darkness is not going to overcome that light. And that's like our hope, Our hope that burns inside of us. As long as we are keeping it fueled with the right things in the right way, that light of hope is going to continue to shine in our lives. But if that begins to dry out and we don't tend it, we don't put the oil in it like it needs, eventually it's going to go out. And the same is true with our hope.

In seasons of waiting. When life is difficult and maybe sometimes feels dark, it can dry out our souls, which is why we need to fuel the flame of hope in our life to keep that light alive. And in our text today, we find that worship and prayer are the fuel that keeps hope alive in the darkness of our world. We're closing out our Christmas series today called Faithful and Fearless, where we've Spent the last few weeks looking at the women of the Christmas story, because, let's face it, there would not be Christmas without women. Guys, can I get an amen?

There would not be Christmas without women. Like, imagine what the last week would have been like if it were up to the men in your life. Wouldn't have happened. I talked to a friend who said, yeah, my wife just buys Christmas presents and then gives them to me and says, here,

this is what you're giving me this Christmas. Like, without women, there would be no Christmas.

Without women, there would be no Christmas story. And so we've looked at the women of the Christmas story. We've talked about Eve, whom God first delivered this promise that he was going to give a gift of a savior. We looked at Bathsheba and saw that God can redeem even the worst moments of our life. Maggie, a couple of weeks ago, did an incredible job preaching on the life of Elizabeth and how to handle disappointment in our life.

Last week, Matt preached one of the best sermons I have ever heard on the life of Mary and how we can prepare for Jesus to show up in our life the way that Mary did. But I gotta be honest, once he started talking about Mary's Fiat, like her response to the angel and saying, let it be, as you have said, all I could think about was Mary driving a Fiat. And so I had to create this picture that just brings me so much joy. Like, I think I'm going to print that off and put it in my office. And so today we are wrapping up this series on the women of Christmas by looking at Anna.

And Anna knew a little bit about what it means to wait, but not just to wait. Anna exemplifies for us what it means to wait faithfully. And she wasn't just waiting in line. She wasn't waiting for vacation to come. She wasn't waiting for the light to turn green.

Anna was waiting for the advent of the Messiah. She was waiting for the coming and the arrival of Jesus. We find Anna toward the end of Luke, chapter two.

Mary and Joseph, all of kind of the festivities are over. The angels have left. The shepherds went back to tending their sheep. Mary's treasured all of these things up in her heart. But then they kind of get up and.

And they move on and they go to the next thing. And eight days later, Luke tells us that Jesus was circumcised, as was the custom. And then they find their way to the temple to participate in some worship rituals after the birth of a newborn child. And as they are walking around the courts of the Temple, they have a couple of very interesting encounters with people. The first was with a guy named Simeon.

Simeon, when he saw Mary holding Jesus, he went up and he grabbed her out of her arms, which, you know, every mom loves it when a stranger does that to their kid. He grabs this newborn out of her arms and he looks at him and he sings praises to God because of this baby. Bessemeon also speaks words that concern Mary. He goes on and he says, this child is going to be a great joy to many people, but he's also. He's also going to cause a lot of pain and conflict.

And then he looks at Mary and he says, even to you, there's going to be pain in your life, Mary, because of this child. And as Mary and Joseph leave that encounter, they can barely wrap their minds around what happened before they run into Anna. And this is what we read. Luke, chapter two. Starting in verse 36, it says there was also a prophet.

Anna, the daughter of Penuel of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage and then was a widow until she was 84. And she never left the temple, but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying, coming up to them at that very moment, them being Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Did you see that Anna was one of the people that was looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem? Anna had spent her life waiting on the advent of the Messiah, waiting on the arrival of the Savior. And when she sees him, she immediately goes and tells everyone about him. And we learn a lot of interesting things about Anna in these three verses. Two things that I want to make sure that we.

That we highlight. Luke says that Anna was a prophet. Anna had the gift of understanding God's messages. She was able to sense what God was up to and what he was doing. Things that other people just looked right past and blended into the crowd.

Anna was able to have the discernment, to see what they were and to understand what they meant. But not only as a prophet did Anna have the ability to understand what God was doing. As a prophet, she also had the ability to proclaim what God was doing. She saw Jesus with her very own eyes. She knew who he was.

She knew what it meant. And she went and she proclaimed it to others. She was a prophet who preached a message of hope about Jesus to all who were waiting for his arrival. But Anna was also a widow. And she'd been a widow for a very long time.

She was probably married at a young age to her husband. Seven years after they got married, he passed away. She's probably somewhere around 84 years old now, which means that for decades she has been a widow. She likely didn't have any children, or else she would have been living with them. But what we get the sense is that she's living kind of around the temple somewhere because she's there day and night.

Luke tells us that she spends her days praying and worshiping and fasting. Anna's life is a picture of patient, faithful waiting. The flame of her hope, it never went out as she waited on the Messiah because she. She fueled it with the things to keep that flame alive.

And I think that Anna teaches us how to be faithful and fearless while we wait.

Specifically, while we wait for Jesus to return. You see, Anna was waiting for the first advent of Jesus. She was waiting for the arrival of the Messiah. We are now waiting for the second advent of Jesus. We are waiting for his return.

And this waiting is sometimes referred to as living in the already but not yet kingdom of God. The already meaning that because Jesus has come the first time, because of his life, death and resurrection, we have hope in the promises of God that he is faithful to us, that he has made a way for salvation for us, that we can commune with him and be relationship with him through the Holy Spirit living in us. This is all our reality now because of our faith in Jesus. But we know that there is more to come. We know that what is going to ultimately happen is that Jesus will return and that he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

And there will be no more mourning, no more pain, no more death, no more sickness, no more disease. We know that that is going to come one day for us when Jesus returns. But it hasn't happened yet. And so we live in this time of waiting between what is and what will be. Until then, we wait like that child on Christmas morning that sees the gifts that belongs to, but she can't quite open them yet because it's not time.

Those gifts are already hers, but not yet. She has to wait. And Anna was waiting and watching for the Messiah to come. And her life, I think, gives us an example to follow while we wait in our life, while we wait for anything in our life, but especially while we wait for. For his return.

And so while we wait, there are some things that we can do to make sure that our waiting is not wasted. Things that we see in Anna's life, and the first thing is faithful worship. Worship is giving thanks and glory to God. Despite her circumstances and her grief, Anna chose a life of worship rather than a life of bitterness. Her worship kept her hope alive for.

For decades as she waited for the coming of the Messiah. Worship is this place where we come face to face with the Creator and sustainer of life. Worship is that place where we remind ourselves of a God who will never leave us or forsake us. Where we remind ourselves and we proclaim to ourselves and to others that, yes, God is always good, even when we walk through the darkest valleys. And worship is not just for moments of joy.

Worship sustains us for every season of life. Worship isn't just for the good times, when things are going the way that we want them to go.

Worship is also for the sad and the lonely and the uncertain times. In fact, I would say that some of the most powerful times of worship in my life have been in some of the most uncertain times in my life. Worship has a way of lifting our eyes from our problems, from our circumstances, and fixing them on a God who is bigger than all of those things.

It lifts our eyes off of what is happening around us and it fixes our eyes on our Heavenly Father, who promises to walk through all of it with us. That's why what we do in here on Sunday mornings matters so much. And you know this. This is not the only place. And singing is not the only way that we worship.

But when we gather here, when we sing, when we fix our eyes on the Father, we are practicing in here, living a life of worship out there. And so while we wait, we fuel the flame of our hope with worship. But we also commit to steadfast prayer. Prayer isn't just a ritual. For Anna, it was a practice that connected her deeply and intimately with the Father.

It kept her in tune with his presence. Which is why I think that she was so ready to acknowledge and know who Jesus was. Was. Prayer is. Is like breathing.

Just like we can't live without air and this flame can't stay lit without oxygen, we cannot sustain hope without constant communication with our Father. I think it's why the apostle Paul tells us in First Thessalonians 5, 16, 18, he says, rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. Say that with me.

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances. And then he closes with this. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Waiting can be frustrating. Can it? It can be disorienting. But Prayer reconnects and reorients our lives and our souls around our source of hope. It quiets our restless hearts and minds.

Prayer gives us perspective, and it deepens our trust in an unfailing God. And there's something inside of us that when we see something good that just wants to cry out and thank somebody, isn't there. And there's something inside of us that when things are falling apart, wants to cry out and say, help. Sometimes simple prayers like that connect us to the deep love of our heavenly Father. When we pray, it leads to gratitude.

It leads to trust. Prayer anchors our hope in the Lord when everything else around us feels like chaos. And so while we wait for the second advent of Christ, we fuel the flame of our hope with worship. With prayer. Now, there's one more thing that we can glean as we kind of

wrap up this morning from how Anna waited.

And it's this man. We wait with others. Did you notice that Anna didn't wait alone? There was a group of people that waited with her. And I like to imagine that they worship and they prayed and they fasted together.

They probably carried each other's burdens. I imagine that many of them were also widows or widowers themselves. They encouraged one another. When Anna had seen the Messiah, these were the first people that she ran back to tell. Like, waiting is hard enough.

We shouldn't have to do it by ourself. And it made me wonder this week. Like, if you had to wait in a line, like you were at an amusement park waiting to get into a concert, if you had to wait in a line, who would you want to wait with? Who would you want to wait with? Chances are you probably wouldn't say, oh, I just want to wait by myself.

I'm fine. It's more fun. Like, if you have to wait, do it with someone else. The first person that came to my mind was David Shunk. I would wait with David.

We would probably be doing pushups. He would be, like, challenging me with things from the word that I'd never thought about before. It would be such a spiritually and physically uplifting time for me. I think the second person I would wait with, some of you know him, Tim Thompson, our Bedford campus minister. I could watch paint dry with that guy, and it'd probably be, like, the most fun I had all day.

Like, if you have to wait, wait with someone. And as we walk in this life where we go through times and seasons of waiting, not just waiting for the second coming of Christ, but waiting for that answered prayer, waiting for this season to pass, waiting for that thing that we long and we hope for. Invite others to wait with you. Be vulnerable enough to invite them and allow them into that space of waiting with you. And as you do, we get to encourage one another.

We carry one another's burdens. We worship and we grow together. We benefit from one another's gifts. So don't wait alone. And I'll close with this.

After years of worship and waiting, Anna's hope was finally realized when she got to see Jesus with her very own eyes. Her waiting wasn't wasted. And our promise in Scripture is that our waiting won't be wasted either. One day. One day, whether he returns or calls us home, when we put our faith in Jesus, one day we will see him with our very own eyes.

One day Jesus will return or he will call us to be with him, and we

will realize that all of our waiting will be worth it. In the meantime, worship, prayer and waiting with others will keep the flame of hope burning in your life and will allow you to see Jesus in any circumstances. You're in today. You may be frustrated. You may be tired of waiting.

You may be upset with God's timing. You may be feeling a little impatient, wondering, God, where are you? What are you doing? You may be tired of waiting on the Lord. I get it.

I've been there. Many of us in this room, we have been there. But as we enter into response this morning, can I just encourage you in these next few moments to quiet your heart?

We're going to have a little time of worship here in a moment. And as we sing, man, just settle into the Lord's presence and turn your attention to Him. Fix your gaze on Him. Spend some time in prayer, reconnecting and reorienting to your source of comfort and grace and peace. And you can do that right where you are.

But we'll have people around the room with lanyards on, and you can go to them and just man, I need someone to pray with me right now. I feel scattered. I'm tired of waiting. Can you just pray for me as you get up to take communion this morning? We have boxes up front and in the back and look around you.

Whenever we take communion, we are proclaiming that we need faith in Jesus to sustain us. We need faith in Jesus to save us. We need faith in Jesus to give us hope. When we take communion, we are proclaiming that we still need Jesus. And as you get up and you walk and you get communion, look around and realize that there are a lot of people standing with you who are proclaiming that they need the very same thing that you do.

That we need one another. Just like Anna, we live in a world that is marked by loss and pain and waiting. But Jesus came to bring redemption not just to Israel, but to the entire world. And through his life, death and resurrection, he made a way for our sin to be forgiven and for us to be restored to God. And so that's why we take communion.

But it's also why we proclaim and we put our faith in Him. And so the invitation this morning is simply this. Just as Anna recognized and embraced Jesus, we are invited to recognize him as our Savior and to put our trust in him for the first time or for the next time. And as we do, he will fill us with fuel to keep the flame of hope. Jesus, thank you for coming for us.

Thank you for laying down all your rights as God, taking on flesh, entering into our world. For showing up to people who, like Anna,



whose lives were filled with pain, who maybe feels, felt lost, forgotten, alone. Even as a baby, she saw you and everything changed in her life. And Lord, in our lives. Still today, when we see you, when we feel your embrace, when you draw close to us as we draw near to you, when we experience you, Lord, everything changes.

And in this world that can sometimes feel dark. And it's hard to keep that flame of hope alive in our life. Lord, may we follow Anna's example and fuel it through worship, through prayer, through connection and community and fellowship. And may that hope burn bright in our lives. And Jesus, when we see you and we see you move and we see, come through and we experience your faithfulness like Anna, may we take that and go and share it with others who need to know that good news in their life too.

So thank you that still today the light of hope burns in the darkness of our lives and our world. And may we share that light with others. I pray it in Jesus name, Amen.