

What are you like at waiting? Do you get impatient when you have to wait in the queue at the Post Office, or the supermarket? Do you immediately get your phone out if you have to hang around anywhere? If you're waiting for the kettle to boil do you fill your time with another job, to make sure that you never have to just stand and wait?

Sometimes waiting isn't just difficult - it's agonising - waiting for news about someone in our family - waiting for a test result...

Waiting doesn't have a good press. And the press are particularly bad at it. If there's no real news yet about some event they fill up the space by speculating about what might happen.

So can waiting be a good thing? Today we are remembering Simeon and Anna - and the only reason we remember them is because they were dedicated to waiting - waiting for the one God was going to send - waiting to see God's deliverance dawn.

Maybe their age gave them the space to wait - and in the waiting, to be open to God's promises with a sense of expectation as they spent time in the temple each day. And that space - that openness - meant that they were able to be in tune with what God was doing, and to be guided by the spirit to be there when Jesus was brought in by Mary and Joseph, and to understand what this meant.

Most of us don't like stopping, and waiting, and doing nothing. We are often caught up in the need to be busy, to 'fill the unforgiving minute with 60 seconds worth of distance run.' But what might we be missing out on?

I'm always struck by the way that two of the most revolutionary saints changed the course of their lives after enforced periods of waiting. St. Ignatius developed his deep spiritual understanding about the ways we can be drawn to God or led away from God as he was convalescing for months after being badly injured in a battle.

St. Francis spent a year in prison as a soldier, and then was seriously ill - and it was after this that he gave up his self indulgent life and set out on a new path with his Lord.

Both Ignatius and Francis had a forced time of waiting - a space - and in that space they were able to tune in to what God was saying to them and then take a radical new direction.

I've been reading this book called *Soulfulness* - I've plugged it before - it would be a very good Lent book! In it Brian Draper tells a story about a friend called Linda. She worked for a large charity which helped the poor and the dispossessed around the world. This was what she believed in - even though she didn't really feel that she was flourishing in that environment.

Then out of the blue, Linda was made redundant. Her working life was put on hold. And instead of rushing to look for a similar job, she stopped and waited and paid attention to something which had been stirring in her.

And now you'll understand why I like this story. Linda had always loved baking. Even while she was working she ran a little business making cupcakes, called 'Filled with love'. Now, as she waited to decide what to do next, she felt that this was the time to follow her soul, and she found some premises and created a café space called 'The Kitchen' which has become a community hub. This is what she says about it...

'I have seen what this place - The Kitchen - is doing for the community and the people who live here. Young mums meet together and receive wisdom from those who went through it all many years ago. People on their own, or elderly couples looking for somewhere to go and 'get out for an hour' bring a book and sit by the window watching the world go by.

Every day we have conversations with people in The Kitchen, ranging from sleepless babies to school places to how to transform our community and nation. We believe we are building community here and our hope is that everyone who visits us will leave happier and more able to face whatever life throws at them.

I've come to see that there are different ways of changing the world. Instead of doing what I felt I ought to do I have followed my gut, my passion -my soul, I guess. It's not always been easy, of course; but I feel a sense of everything I have done in my life so far leading me to this point, and of being where I was meant to be.'

What a great story, I don't think Linda would have found her new direction without her career being stopped. It gave her time to listen. What she talks about reminded me of what we are trying to do with Church in the Village and Coffee, cake and chat - it isn't all about the cake - honestly - it's all about making community.

I bet that Linda had some nervous times, waiting to see if her idea would work. I imagine that she felt a mixture of excitement and anxiety.

But being in that space - with that openness to what God was saying to her deep down - created a wonderful potential for him to be at work through her.

Maybe we find ourselves in a waiting time. Maybe something we used to do has been taken away, or we're just not sure about the future. Is it possible that this might be a time of real potential for us - a time of openness to the deeper currents in our lives?

Perhaps we feel that this is all behind us... We're too old for new ideas or new directions. Well, Simeon and Anna didn't think so. And an idea struck me as I thought about

this. You know the phrase 'God's waiting room' - sometimes used of a Care Home - sometimes of a place like Bognor Regis...

Well, if you associate waiting room with the dentist's, then that doesn't sound so good. But what if you associate it instead with experiencing all the love which God has for you in a complete and wonderful way? What if you were waiting in anticipation of a peaceful ending here and a new beginning with the one who knows you and loves you better than anyone else? That would be a different sort of waiting - waiting with anticipation for what is next.

Perhaps Simeon and Anna can encourage us to use our smaller times of waiting more positively sometimes. I read a story about someone at the checkout one Christmas, getting into conversation with someone else in the long queue, which ending up with telling them what Christmas meant to her, and inviting the person to a social event at church, and that eventually led to that person eventually discovering God's love for themselves at church.

We may not engage someone else in conversation, but we can perhaps use any waiting time we have to be mindful - or rather soulful - to have a few moments of awareness - maybe to be thankful to God for our lives - maybe to pray for those around us.

We are, as they say, human beings, not human doings. Learning just to be, at rest, waiting and open, can make a

real difference in our lives. Our new group for quiet prayer is called 'Waiting in Silence'. I'm sure that for those who go learning to wait together in silence, open to God, will spill out from that time into the rest of their lives.

Maybe Simeon and Anna can encourage us all to try their sort of waiting - active, open, expectant. And maybe you might feel stirring in you the sort of inner excitement and anticipation that I sometimes feel when I wait like this - a bit like having butterflies... What is God going to do today? Where will I see him at work? Where might he lead me in my life...? Wait - and see.