

“Godspeed”  
Luke 2:25-32  
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The phrase Godspeed was meant to **wish someone success**, or a **wish that God would prosper someone**. It comes from the Middle English "God speid", or "God spede you" from the 15th century. It was used to bless someone starting a journey or some special endeavor. It is noted that spede, or speid, is not about swiftness, but prosperity, although another definition mentions that with the greeting is the realization that time is of the essence.

I'm approaching the word more for rumination and reflection...Do God and speed go together? The bible is not silent about God's speed. Let me just say, according to the bible, God's speed is simply amazing. What seems to us to be a long stretch of time, a millennium, a thousand years...to God a thousand years is like a day. So says the Apostle Peter in his second letter. (II Peter 3:8) What that means is that with God, time collapses. What for us feels like an eternity is just a day for God. That kind of speed is impossible to match. God's speed is truly beyond our comprehension.

Knowing that God and speed do go together, and that God's speed is unimaginably fast and quick and, if you will, speedy, what does that mean for us when we think of how God sees and hears things. How speedy is God when it comes to seeing and hearing things?

These thoughts are not random. These thoughts occurred to me as I was reading through the pages of Genesis, the first book in the bible. Back in late September of 2020, the year of the Covid virus, I bought a new bible. I decided to do what I often do, read the bible from beginning to end. I started in Genesis. But this is not the first time I have read the bible from beginning to end. As I read Genesis, I brought to my reading some experiences with other scriptures that come after Genesis. And in reading Genesis, those other scriptures came to mind.

I have mentioned numerous times in sermons I have preached how meaningful the passage is in Exodus, the second book of the bible, when God says to his enslaved and oppressed children, “I have seen your suffering, I have heard your cries. I am concerned. And I have come down to help.” Those words, spoken from the burning bush to Moses, are a powerful testimony that God is not only watching our lives, but God is concerned and comes to our rescue. “I have seen...I have heard...I am concerned...I have come down to help.” (Exodus 3:7,8)

Knowing what I know from Exodus, that God sees and hears, the words literally jumped off the page when I read in Genesis chapter 29 that the first two sons of Jacob, the first two of what will eventually be twelve sons, the first two sons of what will eventually be the twelve tribes of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, are named Reuben and Simeon. Just knowing their names are Reuben and Simeon would not mean much to me, but there is a footnote with each of their names. The name Reuben sounds like the Hebrew for “He has seen my misery.” The name Simeon means, “One who hears.” Years before Moses was ever pushed out into the Nile in a basket of reeds, long before he ever grew up in the house of Pharaoh and then fled to the desert where he tended sheep for forty years, long before the bush ever burst into flames and before God ever said, “I have seen...I have heard...” the first two sons of Jacob were named Reuben and Simeon, “He has seen my misery...and he is one who hears.”

But if those names were given hundreds of years before God appeared to Moses, how does that prove that God acts speedily? The story of the birth of the twelve sons of Israel takes shape with Jacob’s desire to marry the daughter of his uncle, a beautiful young woman named Rachel. Jacob experienced a rude awakening when he opened his eyes after his wedding night and found himself sleeping next to Rachel’s sister Leah, whose appearance was not as desirable as her sister’s. But when it came time to have children, “The Lord saw that Leah was not loved, and so he enabled her to conceive. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, “It is because the Lord has seen my misery.” Leah conceived again, and when she gave birth to a second son she said, “Because the Lord heard that I am

not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon. Leah, who was unloved by her husband, was not unseen by God, and she was not unheard. God saw her misery and God heard her cries, the cries of an unloved wife. And in God’s speed Leah was immediately given two sons, sons who would serve as a sign to her that God sees and God hears. Reuben and Simeon. God sees misery and God hears the cries of the unloved. For all those who feel unloved in our world, I offer that example of God’s speed. For Leah, God’s speed worked on a timetable that met the needs of a hurting person.

If only God’s speed always worked on such a speedy basis. Unfortunately, not every crisis is resolved as quickly as it was for Leah. I have mentioned the names of those two boys who were born immediately to Leah, but by the time God meets Moses and reveals himself in the burning bush as the one who sees the misery of his people and hears their cries, something like four hundred years have passed. There is a passage in Genesis 15 where God has a conversation with Abraham, the father figure for Israel, in which God tells Abraham that his descendants would spend 400 years in Egypt. Which means God appeared to Moses some 400 years after the people had gone into Egypt. 400 years...four centuries...the overwhelming majority of those years spent as slaves, spent in suffering, spent in oppression, experiencing the bitterness of life, years when they were treated ruthlessly. It is only after 400 years in Egypt that God appears to Moses and says, “I have seen your misery and I have heard your cries...” What speed do you think those hurting Israelites felt like God was operating on? For them, crushed by their heavy load, they must have felt like God was working in slow motion. All of which brings us to the flip side of what Peter wrote in his second epistle. Yes, Peter said that with the Lord a thousand years are like a day. But Peter also said, “And a day is like a thousand years.”

We have just said goodbye to a year that felt like an eternity. Regarding 2020 God’s speed seemed to be absent. The year dragged on and was filled with one disappointment after another, to say nothing of the death and illness and financial ruin so many have had to face. And the year slowly ticked along. There are moments when God’s speed suits

us perfectly, things fall together, doors open, opportunities abound, problems are solved, and progress is made. And then there are moments when God's speed is so slow we ache and yearn for things to speed up. But with the Lord, sometimes a day is like a thousand years. Has God's speed ever seemed to be moving at that kind of a slow pace in your life? Has God's speed ever been so slow you felt stuck, like you would never move beyond the painful situation that had you trapped and crying for help?

Peter, the one who writes about God's speed, the speed that makes a thousand years zip by like just a day, and the speed that can make one single day drag on like it was a thousand years...writes about God's speed because there were folks in his time, like there are folks in every time, who felt like God's speed was a little too slow for them. Apparently, it is a very real and human response to the struggles we face to say to God, "Speed things up Lord!" After he writes about God's speed, the days like a thousand years and the thousand years like a day, Peter continues, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness. Instead, God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Without explaining or answering God's speed, Peter does call for us to trust that God knows what God is doing. What seems slow to us, agonizingly slow, is God's patience with this world, is God slowly working and offering our world, and us as individuals in this world, the chance to experience God's salvation, God's healing, God's wholeness. Peter does not solve the mystery of God's speed. But what Peter does say is God is working at the pace God is working for the benefit of salvation. Friends, that much is certainly good to know.

All of which leads me to share a little story that I came across while reading about the Knights of the Round Table, or more accurately when I was reading about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. This story comes from T.H. White's version of the King Arthur tale entitled *The Once and Future King*. In White's telling Merlyn the Wizard has been mentoring Arthur all along the journey of life. White's fun and frolicking tale is especially sweet, because before Arthur knew he was the King, he was just a little wayward boy nicknamed Wart.

Merlyn comes along and takes Wart under his wing, showing him life from a different perspective, helping Arthur discover the mysteries and marvels of this world in ways that one day will influence how Arthur will rule as a king. Along the way little Wart pulls the sword out of the stone, everyone realizes he is royalty, and eventually Camelot is established. The episode I'm going to read to you today comes as Camelot is maturing...as the Round Table is taking shape, as Arthur is beginning to examine the use of force...or as many are familiar, whether might can be used for right...

Arthur tells Merlyn, "My idea is that if we can win this battle in front of us, and get a firm hold of the country, then I will institute a sort of order of chivalry. I will not punish the bad knights, but I will try to get them into our Order. We shall have it make it a great honour, you see, and make it fashionable and all that. Everybody must want to be in it. And then I shall make the oath of the order that Might is only to be used for Right. Do you follow?" Does Merlyn follow? This is what Merlyn has been hoping Arthur would grasp. Yes! Might used for right. Arthur continues, "Do you see the idea? It will be using the Might instead of fighting against it and turning a bad thing into a good thing." Arthur envisions using the Might of the kingdom to defend the vulnerable, to right the wrongs of the past, and to help the oppressed. That's a pretty good use of might. If the Arthur legend were a Christian story you could almost hear Arthur saying, "To proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, recovery of sight for the blind..." Arthur says what he says and then looks to Merlyn with a pleading look in his eyes. In essence the powerful king admits his tiny and tired little mind is exhausted. That's all he can come up with. "I have thought as hard as I could, and I suppose I am wrong, as usual." Then Arthur literally begs Merlyn to give him some response. Is Arthur on the right track? "Merlyn, I can't do any better. Please...say something." In response we discover that, "The magician stood up as straight as a pillar, stretched out his arms in both directions, looked at the ceiling and said the first few words of the Nunc Dimittis."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. H. White, *The Once and Future King*, p. 248

To understand Merlyn's response, a response which is one of great joy and celebration, we need to know what the first few words are of the Nunc Dimittis. Nunc Dimittis is the Latin of "Now dismiss..." and it is in reference to a situation in the New Testament, found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2. After Jesus is born, he is brought to the temple to be presented for the purification rites. Jesus is only a few days old when his parents bring him to the temple. A man was there, in Jerusalem, who had been waiting for God to answer the prayers of the people of Israel, to fulfill his promise of sending a Savior. When that old man saw Jesus he proclaimed, "Now may your servant depart in peace..." That is the Nunc Dimittis. Merlyn hears Arthur start to wrap his tiny brain around the idea that Might could be used for Right...and he says in essence, "Now may your servant depart in peace." All the training of that little rascal Wart has come to fruition. God's speed arrived at just the right time.

That fellow from the New Testament, that fellow who was old, that fellow who had been waiting a long, long time for the God who sees and the God who hears to act, to send the salvation of the people of Israel, well, his name just happens to be Simeon. Remember, Simeon is the name that means, "One who hears." Simeon knew about waiting. Simeon knew about God's time...Godspeed. And at just the right time, while that old man named Simeon was waiting so patiently, God let Simeon know he had heard his plea, he had heard his prayer, and his patience was rewarded. Simeon, the one whose name affirmed that our God is one who hears, was blessed to see the Christ child, the Long-expected Messiah, the child born of the virgin, the hope and the desire of the ages.

As we wait for God in our own lives...as we wait for God in this world where there is so much hurt and so much heartbreak, hear the story of Simeon, one whose waiting is rewarded in ways greater than he could have ever imagined.

When Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to the temple...  
***There was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy***

*Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying*

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”  
(Luke 2:25-32)*

Reading the story of Simeon, a man whose name means, “God hears”, I think back to a sermon a student gave in a preaching course I was leading. She was African American, and as so often with a people who understand waiting in ways much more difficult than I can ever imagine, her two-line sermon knocked the ball out of the park. She said, “God doesn’t always come when you want him...but you will want him when he comes.”

Come, Lord Jesus. We have entered a new year, and we pray this may be a year when we experience your peace, your presence, and your power in ways that lift our spirits and fill our souls.

Godspeed, dear friends. In this year of 2021, I wish you all Godspeed.