"Simeon and Bill Murray – the Waiting Game."
A Sermon delivered by Rev. John Balicki
St. Luke's Church, Wilton, Maine
February 2, 2025; Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord

(*music plays, "I Got You Babe" by Sonny and Cher)*

6:00 AM February 2, 1993. Weatherman Phil Connors, as played by Bill Murray, wakes up in the Cherry Street Inn in Punxsutawney Pennsylvania with Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe" playing on the clock radio. He's there to give the annual report on the appearance of the groundhog Punxsutawney Phil and whether there will be 40 more days of winter or not. Phil gives a half-hearted report on the festivities. Contrary to his weather prediction, a blizzard strikes the area, preventing all travel out of Punxsutawney, and although Phil desperately searches for a way to leave, he is forced to spend the night in the town. The next morning, Phil wakes once more to "I Got You Babe" and, oh no, it's still February 2 and everything is the same as yesterday. And then the next morning, still Feb. 2 and the next morning and the next morning, Phil gradually realizes that he is trapped in a time loop of which no one else is aware. How does he get out of this. Nothing to do but wait? Well stay tuned, but where did all this Groundhog Day stuff come from anyway?

It originated in what we celebrate today in our church, Candlemas Day, 40 days after Christmas, now known as the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple which, according to Jewish law, occurred 40 days after the birth of Jesus. It began to occur as a feast of the Christian Church in the 4th and 5th centuries and by the Middle Ages it became the day to bless the church's candles and because it occurs almost halfway between the winter solstice and spring equinox, it also has an ancient tradition of predicting weather. An old English song goes:

If Candlemas be fair and bright,
Come winter, have another flight;
If Candlemas bring clouds and rain,
Go winter, and come not again.

So those folks in Punxsutawney didn't just start making this stuff up and there is a little convergence between these two seemingly disparate holidays. So let's stretch our imaginations a little bit more and intersect these two great traditions. Let's bring together the prophet Simeon and, well no not Punxsutawney Phil because he speaks mostly German, but the man who made Ground Hog Day much more famous, Bill

Murray. They find themselves at this bar together and there's only one open table left so they sit together, order their drinks and begin to exchange pleasantries and begin to complain about the weather. "This winter is endless; I'm waiting for spring – when will it ever come?" Simeon comes in with "Waiting" let me tell you young man something about waiting. I know all about that. I was waiting all my life for the Messiah. As a young man the Holy Spirit came to me and said I would see the Messiah before I died. So I went to the temple every day – is this the day? Hoping that would be the day – but it wasn't. I began to doubt. Did I hear right? My health wasn't good and yet still I waited.

"Waiting" pipes in Murray "at least the days moved ahead for you Simeon". I was stuck on Feb. 2 forever. Kept waking up every morning, Feb. 2, Punxsutawney Pennsylvania - 40 days in a row – the place I least wanted to be. I didn't want that assignment to go to that little Podunk town. It was a terrible nightmare.

Ahhh young man, Simeon retorts – you think those are nightmares – what would it be like to live your whole life on a promise that never came true. What if I died before seeing the Messiah? But I didn't; one day, the Spirit led me – go to the Temple now – even if it wasn't the normal time and there was this young peasant couple, seemingly very plain the mother and father, but there was something about them and that child, that child.

Yes, Yes, jumps in Murray. I thought nothing was going to work either – Feb. 2 every day for what seemed like forever; I tried everything I could to get out of that day – stealing, eating 20 donuts at a time, even drove off a cliff - but nothing worked. I moved from bitter and cynical to despairing to suicidal. Finally I tried something I used to only mock. Being honest, turning my life around, helping the folks in town in need . .. *I learned that tomorrow will come, and whether or not it is always Feb. 2, all we can do about it is be the best person we know how to be. The good news is that we can learn to be better people. There is a moment when I tell Rita, "When you stand in the snow, you look like an angel." The point is not that I'd come to love Rita. It is that I've learned to see the angel.*

It worked - finally Feb. 3 – no more Sonny and Cher – best day of my life.

"Best day of my life" says Simeon "was seeing that child – lifting him in my arms "my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel". I heard what I said became famous; people sing it now, imagine that.

Murray says, "I like Punxsutawney now" Great people – you can bloom whereever you're planted. You just need to wait and accept God's grace. Maybe some day I'll even lift up Phil when he comes out of his hole on Feb. 2

They leave the bar. Murray leaves a better man but now he has to keep living it. Simeon with a touch of sadness; he saw the Messiah but also saw 33 years ahead to the cross and the pain that would bring his mother. And we're still here. What are you waiting for? Maybe something more important than the weather? More signs of God's kingdom in our midst. More signs of peace and justice. We wait, we hope, we look and . . . we see. In the words of Lauren Winner,

I wish I had the eyes and faith that Simeon had, the eyes and faith to recognize God's redemption in unlikely bodies.

I wish I had the eyes to see God's redeeming work in the world around me, and the faith to proclaim it.

How can I become a person who can recognize God's unfolding redemption, and respond with Simeon's words?

May we all continue to wait for God's promises, May we see and look wherever we are for God's salvation, God's light. There are angels all around us if we take time to notice them. Enjoy your holiday – whichever you choose to celebrate.