

“Go In Peace” Luke 2:22-40 Sunday after Christmas ’20 @ Hope

The Sunday after Christmas is always an interesting moment in the life of the church. What can we possibly do for an encore after we have just experienced the glow of candlelight and the warm beauty of Christmas Eve worship? The situation is ripe for us to feel little flat, anticlimactic.

. But today’s Gospel moves things along swiftly, helping us to get started thinking about the **implications of the great event**. Christ is born. Wonder of wonders. But life moves along. Mary had a baby. What now? Mystery and awe surround this event, an angelic announcement, a virgin birth, but now it gets practical and down to earth. Mary and Joseph had a baby. What do you do now?

Well, **if you are good Jewish mother and father, you wait 40 days and then journey to the temple to offer sacrifice** for mother’s purification (child birth rendered one unclean) and for the redemption of the first born (every first-born male belonged to God and had to be, as it were, bought back) There is no explanation for all this in the text. It was just understood. If you were Jewish and had a baby, you just did it. I’m sure they were eager to get back to the hill country in Galilee, but no, they would stay and go to Jerusalem because that is what they were supposed to do. And when they went it was almost as though someone was there waiting for them... a welcoming committee. **Simeon and Anna** had some meaningful and memorable things to say to them, things which would **never have been said unless they were doing what they were supposed to do.**

The point I’m trying to make is that Jesus’ parents were praying, worshiping, believing people who understood and practiced their faith. This is surely one reason why, as he grew older and stronger, as the text says, “ *he was filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.* ”

Can we learn from them? **The first lesson in this post-Christmas text is the importance of following spiritual routines,** going to the Lord’s house faithfully, not because it is easy, but simply because it is the right thing to do, and it provides real benefits.

There is an abundance of statistical evidence which underscores the

point. Children whose parents attend church regularly are most likely to remain faithful to the church, by large percentages.. Especially if the father is a regular worshipper...not so much if only the mother attends. Parents, particularly fathers... are you listening? You have no idea how important you are to the spiritual nurture of your children.

But **Mary and Joseph were not the only faithful ones.** Who knows how many times old Simeon had faithfully trudged to the temple, looking, hoping, praying for the coming of the promised One. But now, at last, he saw the Lord and was able to go in peace *for his eyes had seen the salvation prepared...*” What a reward for his faithfulness!

I want to spend **the rest of this sermon focusing on old Simeon.** Perhaps on this year-ending Sunday, this somewhat flat, post-Christmas moment, he can help you and me to “go in peace” That is surely what we want... peace in our living and peace in our dying.

In a way, this is a very strange account. During Simeon’s lifetime we know that many false Messiahs had come and gone, none bringing consolation to Israel. Then came Mary and Joseph with a baby, a very common thing. Undoubtedly there were many of other parents there for the same reasons. But with the insight of the Holy Spirit, Simeon somehow knew that this was the one. He took the child in his arms and told God he was now ready to die.

Isn’t this an odd response? Why wouldn’t he now beg for a few more years to see the marvelous unfolding events? Instead, he simply says, *“My eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared... Now I’m ready to go home, in peace.”* We don’t know how long he lived after that. It really doesn’t matter. He lived in peace and he died in peace because he saw the coming of the Lord.

In a way, we can understand this. I recently came across a portion of an **oft-quoted speech made by Martin Luther King.** He had received death threats, and he said, *“ Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t really matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop. I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will and he’s allowed me to go up the mountain. I’ve looked over*

and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. So, I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. “ Within a week, he was dead.

Of course, this was a rather this-wordly “promised land” that he was talking about, racial justice and equality, which in small, yet still inadequate ways, has indeed come about. Progress has been made. But recent events make clear that there is yet a long, long way to go. But the point is that he, and many others, can live and die in peace. It is done by faith. The question is, faith in what? Faith in whom? Is our faith well placed? So that we can live in peace and die in peace??

Now we see why we can celebrate old Simeon's faith. His faith proved dependable. He saw salvation prepared for his people.. a light for Gentiles and glory for Israel. And it was so! It came to full fruition. **That little child, in his living and in his dying, gave light and life to the whole human race, and still gives light and hope and peace to you and me.** It was a vision with a firm foundation.

Simeon's faith is a very good thing for us to reflect upon. We know that heaven is in our home, but I think I speak for almost everyone when I say, “ *we're not exactly homesick*” We have no immediate plans for dying. Like Simeon, I'm an old man, but. I hope to live a while longer. Too much yet to see and do and accomplish. 2021 beckons with all its hopes and dreams, challenges and opportunities.

What is your promised land? What are you waiting to see and do? And what kind of faith do you have that that vision will come to fulfillment? On what, on whom do you base your hopes and dreams?

I'm afraid that too many of **our dreams have a rather narrow scope..too much** tied to this world. We dream about reaching the next rung on a career ladder, or being able to retire. We think about new developments in our families...the hope of marriage or a new child. Or we focus on health issues, hoping to escape the dreaded Covid, for remission from cancer and a positive prognosis. Or perhaps our thoughts are more global. Hoping for the full recovery of our economy and low

un-employment... or a greener environment, or issues of peace and racial justice. Nothing wrong with hoping for these things, working for these things... but is this your promised land? And what faith do you have that any of these concerns will have positive and satisfying conclusions?? What are the odds for you to reach your promised land? On what..on whom do you base your hopes and dreams? **Allow old Simeon to teach us a lesson.** With faithfulness and devotion he came to the temple, day after day, year after year. And the Spirit of God rewarded that faithfulness by pointing him toward the One who would console and redeem all people. And his heart was filled with such a deep and lasting peace that he was ready to die. As far as he was concerned he had drunk from the deep well. He had seen the light. And he had no doubts that all God's promises would come to fruition. There would be hard times. A sword would pierce thru Mary's soul. We see her weeping at the foot of the cross...but also rejoicing at the empty tomb. **Simeon's faith was built on a rock, on sure and lasting things. He saw the true promised land and he knew that his hopes and dreams would be fulfilled.**

The Spirit of God has also pointed us toward the One who would redeem all people. We have been led to Jesus, and baptized in His Name. ..cleansed, forgiven. We know the rest of the story. We are encouraged to build our hopes and dreams on His promises. If we would have a "*faith that will not shrink, though pressed by many a foe*" then we must build that faith on the Rock, on the sure foundation, the only One who will lead us to the promised land.

So then let us make our new year's resolution. "*I will build my vision for the future on the foundation of the presence and promises of the Lord..his presence with me.. he promises to me. I will faithfully walk in his way, and trust that He will never leave me or forsake me. In that trust he will enable me to live in peace, and depart in peace.*" God grant it for all of us.. Amen.