

December 29, 2019

First Sunday of Christmas
Vicar Zach Sarrault
Hope Lutheran Church
“Waiting For Promises”

Do any of you have role models? People who you are inspired by and want to model your life after. Many of us have role models, to one degree or another. When you were younger maybe you looked up to an athlete or other celebrity and as we get older our role models change. They could be parents, siblings, or grandparents. Maybe even a historical figure that lived an inspiring and motivating life.

It can be fun to have role models. They are people we look up to in a way and try to model our lives after. Hopefully they are people that have led good, healthy lives and we try and follow the examples they have led. We see that others have done something right, helping them to achieve something great so we try and follow their example so we too can hopefully do what others before us have done.

No matter who our role models may be, they are often people that are older than us. People that lived dedicated lives, people who lived for something. They were motivated, disciplined, and hard working. Those are the people that inspire us and give us reason to look up to them.

In our text today from Luke's gospel, we find a couple people that have these characteristics. Characteristics that would qualify them to be good role models, people we can look up too. They were motivated, very disciplined, and extremely hard working individuals, but not exactly in the way that we would expect. They weren't famous in their day and to be honest, they're not really that famous today either. But their fame is not what makes them good role models, it is the lives they led. Lives of faithful obedience, looking forward to God's promises.

First, we come to Simeon. Mary and Joseph have come to the temple to offer sacrifices according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, which we heard in our reading from Exodus a moment ago. They are just doing what all Jewish parents are supposed to do with their firstborn son, nothing out of the ordinary. Except of course their son, who is the Son of God. But baby Jesus doesn't have a halo around His head or rays of sunshine flowing out of Him. He's just another baby. Crying and smelly and everything. No one takes notice of Him except for two people.

Simeon, who had received a promise from God that He would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ, sees Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple. When he sees the baby, he knows immediately that this is no normal baby. Simeon sees with eyes of faith and he realizes that this is the promised Messiah, the one that he had been waiting for for so many years. Without asking Simeon runs over to Mary and Joseph and picks up baby Jesus and starts praising God.

The promise that God made to Simeon had been fulfilled! Simeon had now seen the Lord's Christ. He had been faithfully waiting for this very moment, trusting in the promise that God had made to him. Nothing flashy or special, he simply heard a promise from God and trusted that promise would

come. Like our role models, Simeon was disciplined, motivated, and hard working as he waited for God's promise to come true.

Luke tells us that Simeon was righteous and devout as he waited for Christ, the Savior, to come. He kept his focus on what God had told him. We don't know when exactly God revealed to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the Christ, but we know it wasn't just a week before Jesus shows up. Simeon had been waiting a long time, but he never lost focus. He was devout in his waiting. He was committed to the promise that God had made him and he lived his life looking forward to that promise.

We too are waiting for a promise of God to be fulfilled. His last promise, the promise that His Son, Jesus, will return in all glory to create a new heaven and a new earth. As children of God, we anxiously await the return of Christ, when there will be no more pain and suffering, no more anxieties and fears. On the day of Christ's return all will be perfect once again, just as God intended things to be. Simeon was waiting for Christ's birth and we now wait for that same Christ, the one born in a manger, to return to this earth in power and glory.

But the promise we have received is a little different than the one that Simeon received. Simeon was told by God that he would not die before he saw the Christ child. Simeon, as a devout Jew, knew that God always kept His promises. Simeon would have remembered the stories of the exodus out of Egypt and how God always provided for His people. Simeon trusted that God's word would once again be fulfilled and that he truly would stay alive until he saw the Christ. Whenever that may be. But for us, the promise of Christ's return is a little more ambiguous.

None of us have been given the guarantee that we will stay alive until Christ's return. In fact, I'm sure that most of us, myself included, assume that Christ will not come back before we die. We assume that we will live out our lives on earth and pass away just like all those that have gone before us. It's easy to think this way, it's easy to live this way because it's hard to wrap our minds around the fact that Christ could actually return at any time.

God has given us a promise. It is a promise that as sons and daughters of God our heavenly Father, we can look forward to. We can look forward to Christ's return because we know what will happen to us when He returns. As those that believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we know that we will be welcomed into the kingdom of God when Christ returns.

Even if we have this confidence, what does that mean for our living today? If God's final promise of Christ's return could be fulfilled at any moment, then how should we live right now? Well, if Christ really could come back at any time, then why should we do anything?

We can follow the example of Simeon. He can be our role model for what it looks like to be waiting anxiously God's promise to be fulfilled. He knew what he was waiting for. He might not have been expecting a baby brought in by low-to-middle class parents, but he knew he was waiting for the Savior. The one who is a light to the all people, who will bring peace and forgiveness into the world. The one who is the salvation of God. And this one, the one he was waiting for was where he kept his focus.

It can be hard for us to follow the example of Simeon and keep our focus on the return of Christ. We don't know when He will return, no one does, but we know that He will return. God made a promise that He will send His Son back to this earth to make all things new, and God always keeps His

promises. So we keep our focus on the Son, Jesus Christ. We live as Simeon did, in excited anticipation for Christ's return and we keep our focus on Him.

But that's not always easy. Even during the Christmas season, a time when we should be excited and have our focus on Christ, we become distracted with all the tasks that come with the season. Now that Christmas is over, now that we get to head back to our normal routine, our focus can shift again. It can shift away from the Christ child and back to the normal worries and anxieties of this world. Rather than looking forward to Christ's return we get caught up in what is happening in the here and now. Letting our worries overtake us or our desires to distract us from where our heavenly Father wants our focus to be.

But we're now going into yet another holiday. A holiday that isn't a church holiday like Christmas is supposed to be, but a purely secular holiday. We're coming to the new year. A holiday that many of us look at as a time to try new things, or try that old thing one more time. Many new year's resolutions have to do with improving ourselves. Maybe it's eating better or reading more or starting to run again. We're looking to improve our own health. In a way these new year's resolutions have to do with refocusing our lives.

God calls us to refocus our lives. Not in a worldly way that most people think of with new year's resolutions, but in a way that reflects the love of Christ and the example of people like Simeon. We refocus our lives, looking towards Christ and His return. This doesn't mean you have to go and sell everything you own, climb to the highest mountain and wait for Christ returning on the clouds. No, God wants us to refocus with what He has already given us.

God has given us these gift of Scripture, the real and true Word of God, He invites us to talk with Him through prayer, He has brought us into His family which we see on earth as the Church. As Children of God, our heavenly Father has graciously given us all of this to keep our focus on His promise that Christ will return. Our Father has equipped us with what we need as we wait.

As we make new year's resolutions to get finically stable or get back in shape, which are great resolutions, let us also fix our focus back on Christ. Back on the one who came to this earth as a light to the Gentiles and the salvation of the world. God knows that our focus often drifts from where it should be. We can get caught up by the temptations and lies of the devil who is always creeping around. God knows that we fail and come up short.

Because God knows all this, He also knows that we need a Savior. Out of His love, He sent His Son. That little baby that Simeon had been waiting for. That little boy that Simeon took up in his arms rejoicing, because he knew that that boy was the Christ, the one who came for the forgiveness of all people. Christ came to this earth to die for you and me, but not to stay dead. He rose from the grave conquering all or fears and failures, claiming us as His people. And one day He will return.

Christ is returning in all His glory. He is coming to make all things new, but as we wait we can follow the example of Simeon. Use the gifts that God has placed before you. Center your life on the Word. Take time to sit down and read the Bible, on your own or with your family. Take time to pray before meals. Take time to re-center your focus on Christ, as we wait for His return.