

1 S. after Christmas 12/30/18
Luke 2:22-40 C

LORD, NOW YOU ARE LETTING YOUR SERVANT DEPART IN PEACE,
ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.

In our Gospel lesson for today, the Evangelist Luke introduces us to Simeon and Anna, both of whom had been waiting, waiting a long time, for the birth of Jesus. We live in an age where everything seems to be focused on youth. I wouldn't go so far as to say the aged are despised; but I dare say ignored. There is not a lot of excitement over the wisdom and experience of those who have lived many years, through many life experiences.

But I would contend, especially as we look at the faith and lives of Simeon and Anna, there is much to be learned. You can learn much about marriage from someone who has been married 50 or more years. You can learn much about life from those who have several scores in. You can learn much about prayer from those who have prayed a long time. You can learn much about patience, from those who wait.

Those who have lived a long time on this side of heaven know about waiting. They wait for the mail. They wait for their next doctor's appointment. They wait for family to call or friends to drip by.

"I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord," the Psalmist says (130:5-6a). How those words describe Simeon and Anna. They are two saints of God, who waited on the Lord, whose hope was in His Word. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn 11:25-26). Simeon and Anna lived in that promise. Today, WE LEARN WHAT IT

MEANS TO LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH AND TO DIE IN THE LORD.

The Evangelist describes Simeon as “righteous and devout”. That means he did not trust in his own righteousness, his good works, or his being somehow, someway better than his neighbor, he trusted in God’s plan of salvation in the Messiah and lived in that trust. Simeon had been somehow told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Imagine what it would be like knowing you were not going to die until you saw God’s plan of salvation with your own eyes, and not knowing when that would be. Every day, Simeon was watching and waiting. Would today be the day? The sun would set in the evening, the sun would rise in the morning, and ... nothing. Maybe tomorrow, the Messiah would come. And more waiting and waiting.

We don’t know how many years Simeon waited. Imagine the excitement that day when Mary and Joseph brought their baby boy, now 40 days old, to the temple, to do as the Law of God commanded them to do. Nothing happens by chance in God’s creation. The Holy Spirit brought this aged saint of God to the temple at just the right time. What a marvelous moment that must have been when he took the baby Jesus in his arms. You parents and grandparents, know the excitement of holding that little one for the first time. So, you can, in some way, understand Simeon’s excitement that causes him to sing out in glorious words,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Simeon is confident. Simeon is walking by faith. He knew God would take him from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.

Simeon holds God to His Word. Look at his words, “My eyes have seen your salvation”. What exactly did Simeon’s eyes see? The same thing the shepherds saw when they came to the manger the night of His birth. The same thing the wise men saw when they came bringing their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Simeon saw a baby boy, with hands and feet, eyes, just like any baby. There was no halo, no crown, no army of angels attending Him. Just a baby, and His parents who came to do what God commanded them to do.

But in faith, Simeon saw more than just a baby boy, He saw His salvation. He saw in this baby the atoning sacrifice for His sins. He knew, in faith, God would take the life-blood of this baby boy, so that He would live. In this baby boy, Simeon knew he could die in peace.

This, this, Dear Saints of God, is the Light shining into the darkness of our sin and death. In seeing and holding the Christ child, Simeon’s eyes are opened to salvation, a salvation that is a light of revelation to all nations, including the Gentiles. The One who knew no sin who became sin so that could become the righteousness of God.

And then, acknowledging their faith, Simeon blesses Jesus’ parents. Specifically, speaking to Mary, Simeon tells her the destiny of her child, “this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed” (v. 34). Simeon reminds us many will rise to eternal life in this Christ child, but many will also “fall” because of Him. The Apostle Peter reminds us that Jesus is a stumbling block some will trip over. Even though He will die for everyone, many will reject Him and His Word. Jesus’ words to the scribes and Pharisees echo Simeon’s words to Mary,

“Everyone who falls on that stone will be dashed to pieces; on whomsoever it falls, it will crush Him” (20:18).

I point that out, Dear Friends, because of the restless age in which we live. Satan has so twisted and departed our sinful minds that the mantra of our day – and I emphasize this is a lie of the father of all lies -- is along the lines of all different religions are just different paths to the same heaven. Simeon teaches us, clearly, otherwise. Simeon teaches us that God’s plan of salvation centers of this child of Mary and Joseph. Be baptized and believe in Him, and you shall be saved. Reject Him, trust in your own righteousness, or in another savior, and you will fall.

Martin Luther re-enforces this lesson for us by using the words of Simeon. It is thought provoking, again remembering the times in which we live, that Martin Luther, the reformer of the Church, made only one change to the Divine Service liturgy. You know what it is, don’t you? He added Simeon’s song into the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper. Think of what happens in our Divine Service. We’ve confessed our sins and been absolved, we’ve heard the words of Christ, we’ve feasted upon the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. And, we are ready to depart in peace, not simply go home from Church, back to our daily lives, fulfilling the vocations which God has given, to be Christ to our neighbor, but – but -- we are ready to die in peace, whenever God is ready to call us home.

In our lesson this morning, Luke provides us a beautiful scene of this little Church in Jerusalem. There is Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna, and, of course, their Savior Christ is with His Church. There you have this little congregation in this valley of the shadow of death, ready to die in the light of life. There you have the Lord’s Church, doing what the

Lord's Church does on earth – hoping, and waiting, and confessing her Lord Christ.