

1 S. after Christmas 12/27/20
Luke 2:22-40 B

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

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Ps 23:4). The Psalmist so well describes this world in which we live today – it’s dark and it’s scary. And yet, we rejoice that because Jesus has been born to open heaven to us, we are strangers here. In our Gospel lesson for today, we learn from Simeon WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH AND TO DIE IN THE LORD.

“I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my souls waits for the Lord,” the Psalmist says (130:5-6a). How those words describe Simeon.

The Evangelist tells us Simeon is “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 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 yet 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. But from the context of Luke’s Gospel, we could guess a long time.

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of the woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law” (Ga 4:4-5). And when that Son was 40 days old, Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple, to do as the Law of God commanded them to do. Nothing happens by chance in God’s creation. God the Holy Spirit brought this aged saint of God to the temple at just the right time, that God’s promise to him would be fulfilled. 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, because the blood of this Babe of Bethlehem had reconciled him to God. The One who knew no sin who became sin so that could become the righteousness of God.

In the newborn Christ, we see our salvation. Jesus promises us, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (Jn 14:3). Like Simeon, we believe. We walk by faith. We know God will take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.

Today, we find ourselves waiting. And, waiting is so hard, isn't it? We've waited and waited, and it seems Jesus is never coming. We grow impatient. We are in the world, and we are not to be of this world any more than Jesus was of this world; but, honestly it is so easy to become of this world in our impatience, isn't it? Ya, ya, ya, we are strangers here, but we become pretty comfortable here. We find ourselves in over our head in debt, all because the greed eyed monster of jealousy reared its ugly head and you had to have it because your neighbor has it. That woman you ogle and covet, she would bring so much happiness to your life. Earthly life can have its thorns, so we drown our sorrows with way too much alcohol. Our neighbor has hurt us, perhaps grievously, or they won't do things my way, so you hate. And you use your tongue to spread gossip about them, to make them look bad, so that you can look all the better in the eyes of the world, and in your own eyes.

What do our eyes see? Far too often, we take our eyes off Jesus to fix our hearts and love and fear and trust on the things of this world. But, God is good. He draws us back to Jesus. With our sin before us and firm faith that the blood of that Babe of Bethlehem has reconciled us to God, we repent, "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24). The Good News is that He does. He forgives. And keeps us in the faith He began at our baptism. He breathes the eternal life of Christ into us. And, He feeds us the life-giving body and blood, which is how you are most likely familiar with the Nunc Dimittis, as we commonly know the words of Simeon as.

It is thought provoking, remembering that we are strangers here and heaven is our home, that Martin Luther, the reformer of the Church, made only one change to the Divine Service liturgy. 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.