

12-13-2020 SERMON CCI Luke 2: 22- 35 Do We See What Simeon Saw?

It's not easy to see different points of view. I was in a Facebook conversation last week with 2 relatives. One had posted their belief that Time magazine should have named healthcare workers as this year's Persons of the Year and I responded that I agreed. Healthcare workers have been real heroes and deserve the honor. I even stated that although I looked forward to a new calmness in 2021, Biden and Harris have not done anything in 2020 except get elected, so this honor does not belong to them. Because we come from different points of view, the conversation became about what's wrong with Biden and Harris rather than the very rare fact that we all actually agreed on something! It can be hard to see what someone else sees.

The story in today's scripture reading takes place about a month after Jesus' birth. The Jewish law required that Joseph and Mary dedicate their firstborn son to the Lord. Dedicating first born sons was a way of providing for priests from all the different tribes; it was a parent's honor to see their son grow up to be a priest. We see an example of dedicating firstborn son in the Old Testament story of Samuel. Samuel's mother, Hannah, had been unable to conceive for years, and she promised the Lord that if she could just have one son, she would dedicate him to the Lord. The Lord answered her prayer with the birth of Samuel, who grew up to become an important judge in early Jewish history. Parents who needed their firstborn sons at home could, with no shame, give an offering of 5 shekels to be released from the dedication. Mary and Joseph could have done that. But like Hannah, they brought their special child to the Temple to be dedicated to the Lord.

Into the Temple that day walked elderly Simeon. Luke doesn't tell us that Simeon was a priest, scribe, Pharisee, or rabbi. He probably was a priest because Joseph and Mary presented Jesus to him. But Luke tells us what mattered more- Simeon's character- he was a righteous man, devout, and moved by the Spirit. He had been waiting and looking for the Consolation of Israel, the Messiah, to come. Waiting and waiting. Waiting with the Spirit's promise that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. What would we do with such a promise from God- would we live more faithfully or more recklessly since our lives were safe? Simeon waited faithfully, listening to the voice of the Spirit. And on the day that Joseph and Mary arrived at the temple, the Spirit said, "Go to the temple, the One you wait for has come." And faithful Simeon went to his divine appointment with Jesus.

Some of us watched Vice President Mike Pence do a victory clap on TV last week, where he jogged from the plane and up the stairs of the stage, clapping his hands with a smile on his face as he prepared to speak to the crowd. Was that what Simeon was like that day, as he left his home and headed for the temple? Did he walk faster with a skip in his step, and a smile on his face he couldn't stop even if he tried? Who did he expect to see? Perhaps one of the younger priests, or a young adult man who had studied with the rabbis? Did he expect to be led to a... baby?

Yet, as Joseph and Mary presented Jesus to Simeon for his dedication, Simeon saw the answer to his waiting, praying, and trusting God's promise. What did his elderly eyes see? A simple month-old firstborn Jewish baby boy with his proud, faithful parents. There was nothing special about him, wrapped up in blankets like any other Jewish baby boy of that day.

Joseph and Mary were a typical-looking couple, there was nothing dramatic in this moment- no trumpet blowing, no golden light glowing down from above shining onto Jesus' face like in the movies- nothing dramatic to signal Simeon that this was the One. But he knew from the top of his bald head down to his old wrinkled toes that this was the One. And Simeon began to sing! He could die in peace now because he held the Lord's promise in his own arms!

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

Simeon sang with joy of the salvation of the whole world that day!

Then he blessed Joseph and Mary, and I imagine they stood a little taller and smiled. Remember, it was a parent's honor to have their son dedicated to the Lord. But again I ask, what did Simeon see that day? There, before the babe could even speak, long before Jesus of Nazareth would utter the words, "I am the Light of the world." Before the people could be astounded at his teaching and his healings. Before he fed the thousands with a boy's lunch and calmed the winds with his voice. Before Mary's son would be hung on a cross to die for the sins of the world. Before all of that, Simeon sang of the revelation of God's love in Christ for all the world, not just a few. He saw God's kingdom breaking in on earth. Herod still sat on his throne and Caesar still governed from afar. The world looked just as it did before. And yet, Simeon saw through the eyes of faith, and joyfully sang of God's future that he would not live long enough to see come to pass. Did Joseph and Mary beam with joy at the good news about their son?

But not all would be joy in this babe's life. Their son would grow up to be the reason some people would rise and others fall. His message will cause many to stumble. We heard John the Baptist stumble over Jesus last Sunday. Some who were first will become last and others who were at the end of the line will be moved to the front. That will bring anger. Some will be sheep and others will be goats. Jesus will bring peace and yet, he will bring division. He will be spoken and fought against. This Christ will bring the truth of people's hidden motives out into the open and he will be hated for it. Jesus will cause all who hear him to choose whether to believe and follow him or not. Simeon looked straight at Mary because a sword will pierce her motherly soul- she won't always be able to protect her son like a mother lion protects her cubs. I wonder if her beaming began to fade a bit at those words.

What do we see when we look at infant Jesus during this season? This Christmas banner is a lovely scene that I enjoy gazing upon. It's what I think of when we sing about peace and goodwill on earth. Peaceful, quiet, safe and undisturbed, baby Jesus' eyes are open as he lies happily, he's not even crying to be fed or held, although I want to put some pajamas on those little naked shoulders and arms! In our day with the fears and dangers, peace is a strong desire. Who doesn't want more peace?

Simeon saw so much more as he held the infant Christ. Can we see what Simeon saw? Can we look upon our still broken and bruised world, a divided and angry nation, a virus that is sickening and killing more people everyday and a vaccine that is months away for most of us, and yet sing like Simeon- *Joy to the World, the Lord is come?* Do we see the places where

God's kingdom is breaking into our world- the moments when one life touches another and spirits are lifted? When truth exposes hidden motives? When those forced to the end of the line by the powerful are finally welcomed to the front? Can we see God's kingdom breaking into our lives- sometimes out in the open and others times quietly as a gift we can only see by faith? The evidences of the kingdom Jesus told John to look for- when blindness is taken away, the crippled walk, and healing comes. When sadness is transformed into purpose, when minds are changed toward God's goodness and light. John struggled to see it. Will we? Simeon's song invites us this Advent to **see** the evidence of God's promised kingdom breaking through, invites us to be a part of the breakthrough, not for ourselves, but so Jesus can be born in the hearts of today's people. Do we have eyes to see what Simeon saw? Will we join his song?