

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Leaving in peace?"

Scripture: Luke 2:21-40

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December 27 2020

Songs/Hymns: See amid the winter's snow 168, The first nowell 136 (chorus after vs 1/3/6), What child is this 161, Good Christians, all rejoice 141

It is just a few days
Before the end of the year.

Most of us are happy to see the backside of 2020:
Australian bushfires, global pandemic,
Death of Kobe Bryant, Stock market crash,
"murder" hornets, the Beirut explosion,
Westcoast wildfires,
and the 59th Presidential Election.

I ran across this picture of a 2020 Christmas ornament (show slide).
2020 is envisioned as a dumpster fire.

It is just a few days
Before the end of 2020.

Well good riddance.
Most of us are happy to see it over and done.

But even as we celebrate the end of a year,
Let me ask you,
"Have you ever spent any time
thinking about your own ending?"

Do you see it marked by distress?
Or can you imagine taking your leave,
Making your exit in peace?

What would you need to leave in peace?

- The completion of an important project.
- The restoration of a broken relationship.
- Having your finances in order.
- Seeing your children or your grandchildren successfully leave the nest.

What would you need to finish your life in peace?

PAUSE

Today's Bible passage from Luke takes us from the nativity story
Of just a few days ago
and ushers us to the Temple
maybe forty days after Jesus' birth.

Mary and Joseph are devout parents.
 They pay attention to divine revelation
 Whether it comes via an angel or the Torah.ⁱ

And so, they have come to Jerusalem
 To fulfill two Old Testament rituals:
 The redemption of the first-born
 and the purification of the mother.ⁱⁱ

But even as they keep the law
 God is fulfilling other purposes.

Luke tells us about two other people,
 Two devout individuals who are at the temple;
 people who have spent their lives waiting
 For God's plans to be revealed.

Simeon we are told
 Was waiting for the "consolation of Israel".
 Anna proclaims the "redemption of Jerusalem"ⁱⁱⁱ

We are told that they are waiting on God
 To see their heart's desire.

And we are told that they are old.
 In fact, we are told that Anna was 'very old'.
 Very old for her time (middle old for our time)
 was 84 years old.

Despite our misconceptions
 people in Jesus' time did reach a ripe age.

That is if they were lucky enough
 to survive the dangers of childbirth
 or get through their middle years
 without modern medical knowledge and care.^{iv}

The point of noting Anna's age was not to suggest
 Something miraculous about her longevity,
 But to underscore how she and Simeon had been waiting.
 Waiting for days and years.

But that morning was somehow different.
 Simeon was tipped off by God's Spirit
 that he needed to go to the Temple.

When he saw the young couple with their newborn
 He was given the insight to recognise
 That this was a special child.

And so he swoops in among the parents,
 Lifts the child in his arms and praises God
 With these words:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
 you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation,
 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
 and the glory of your people Israel.”^v

On that day in the Temple Simeon and Anna’s waiting are over.

They are given a glimpse of the salvation
 That God is giving to Israel and the world,
 In that little child of Mary and Joseph.

When Simeon talks about his eyes seeing God’s salvation,
 He is making a word-play on the name of Jesus.

As the Presbyterian scholar Stephen Farris
 notes in one commentary:
 “the Hebrew root of the name “Jesus,”
 [is] “the Lord is my salvation.”

Simeon is [literally] holding “salvation” in his arms.”^{vi}

And when Simeon blesses God saying
 “...you may dismiss [or release] your servant in peace.”
 There is a double-meaning:

Dismiss can mean, ‘let me die’
 And it can also mean ‘release me from this vigil’^{viiiviii}

Because Simeon has beheld God’s salvation in Jesus,
 He can both live or die in peace.

Simeon gets a glimpse of God’s salvation.
 It is enough for him to let go and move on.

How about you?
 What will it take for you to move on in peace?

Do you need?

- The completion of an important project.
- The restoration of a broken relationship.
- To have your finances in order.
- To see your children or your grandchildren successfully leave the nest.

Could it be that more than any of these
You simply need to encounter Jesus.

You simply need to see that God is working out our salvation;
that God's rescue plan is at work.

My prayer is that at the end of 2020 you may have that encounter,
That lets you live or die in peace.

My prayer is that even if you are old, or very old
You may hear that word from God we all need.

I would like to share with you a reading from Cloth for the Cradle

"It was to older folk that Jesus came"

It was to older folk that Jesus came,
that they might know their place and learn his name,
and upset notions of whom God may choose
to change the world or celebrate good news.

And this they understand who have been told
of Sarah who conceived when she was old;
and Hannah who found joy despite her tears;
and Naomi who blessed her later years.

With Zechariah, zealous for routine,
ensuring what's to come is what has been,
they may disclaim an angel's message too
declaring God intends to make things new.

Like Simeon, resigned to failing power,
old age might yet become the finest hour
for those who risk false claims that they're deranged
by saying God wants all things to be changed.

It is not in the manger Christ must stay,
forever lying helpless in the hay;
it is by older folk Jesus is blessed,
who see God's restlessness in him expressed.^{ix}

Amen.

ⁱ Herzog, W. R., II. (2008). *Exegetical Perspective on Luke 2:22-40*. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B* (Vol. 1, p. 167). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

ⁱⁱ Stephen Farris "Luke 2:22-40" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 302.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Luke 2:25, 38.

^{iv} It has been noted that "individuals born before 100 BC lived as long (median 72 years) as those who died in the periods 1850-1899 and 1900-1949 (median 71 and 71.5 years)."

^v Luke 2:29-32 NIV

^{vi} Stephen Farris "Luke 2:22-40" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Gospels* 303.

^{vii} Luke 2:29 NIV

^{viii} Herzog, W. R., II. (2008). *Exegetical Perspective on Luke 2:22-40*. In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year B* (Vol. 1, p. 167). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

^{ix} "It was to older folk that Jesus came: Christmas reading 1" *Cloth for the Cradle* 81