

"Simeon"

Luke 2:22-40

Fourth Day of Christmas, Year B

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

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When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Prayer.

Slavery is an evil institution.

It leaves an indelible mark for generations.

The traditions of slavery are not easily forgotten.

A child born of a slave was to be presented to the slave owner,

As if his holdings had expanded and become more valuable.

It was a humiliating tradition,

More hurtful to mother and father than lashes from a whip.

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When our Hebrew ancestors won their freedom from the Egyptian king
 At the hand of the Lord
 and by the good work of Moses,
 They never forgot this humiliating rite.
 So they recast the practice
 Such that no one would forget
 The humiliation
 And everyone would now remember
 Where to lay the mantle of thanksgiving.
 Exodus 13:2 reads
 "Consecrate to me all the firstborn;
 whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites,
 of human beings and animals, is mine."
 Today we read that Mary and Joseph honor the tradition
 By remembering from where they came
 And to whom belongs the praise.
 They present Jesus in the Temple
 Consecrating him to God
 Affirming his identity as God's own.¹

Jerusalem's Temple was an economy all unto it's own.
 It was a filled place every day of the year.
 People from throughout the region gathered
 Bringing animals for sacrifice
 Removing money for the treasury
 Attending rites for purification
 Worshipping with prayers and sacrifice
 Paying their annual Temple tax.
 It was a place to be seen,
 And to see
 Every aspect of early Jewish life.

A devout and righteous man
 Watched and waited every day
 For the consolation of Israel;
 The moment when God will console
 Those remaining few
 Who still lived in exile.
 This watchful man's name was Simeon,

¹ For this, and other thoughts on this passage, I am indebted to Dr. Holly Hearon, Professor of New Testament, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN, as found at:
http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=12/28/2008#

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Luke tells us.
 The Holy Spirit had visited him,
 The third godhead of the Trinity,
 And revealed to Simeon that he would not die
 Until he saw the Lord's Messiah.
 The same Spirit leads him to the Temple
 The identical time Mary and Joseph come to present Jesus.
 Their meeting was not happenstance.
 It was divinely orchestrated.

Simeon takes Jesus into his arms,
 Lifts his eyes heavenward,
 Praising God, and saying,
 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
 ... for my eyes have seen your salvation,
 ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles
 and for glory to your people Israel."
 The last exile has come home.
 The last Hebrew in captivity has been repatriated
 The consolation of Israel has come with the Messiah,
 God's chosen one,
 God's own Son,
 Jesus, the Savior of the world.

As the Spirit ordained the crossing of their paths that special day
 Did a cross shaped image impose itself on Simeon's vision?²
 "Your child will be the falling and rising of many,
 and a sword that will pierce your own soul."
 This thin wisp of a cirrus cloud
 Casting a nearly imperceptible shadow upon the landscape
 Would only be seen in hindsight
 As a hint of the deeper meaning of Messiah.
 Not a freedom fighter, but a revolutionary;
 Not a politician or general, but truly a leader;
 Not working only for today, but working for an eternity
 Of change, of transformation, of salvation.

"Now!" cries Simeon.
 "Now my eyes have seen salvation"
 And we,
 Like Anna

² With thanks for this image to: the Rev Moira Laidlaw, Uniting Church in Australia.

Have only one response:
Praising God!
Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praising God for the Good News of Jesus' birth!
Praising God for the salvation that has come!
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!
Amen.

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