

First Sunday after Christmas – 2023

Isaiah 61:10—62:3

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:22-40

A lady in her 90's said to me on Christmas Day, "I think that God has forgotten about me." She said it in jest, a light-hearted remark of having passed her "use by" date, her "sell by" date. How many of y'all are chronologically beyond your "peak quality"? Old men tend to have issues. This is not to say that old women don't, but let's just stick with the XY side of the house. Simeon was an old man. It's a safe bet that Simeon had issues. No doubt, this priceless coffin-dodger had seen what a fallen creation wreaks on the body, what a fallen creation wreaks on families and culture. Old people have seen more than their younger counterparts. On average, that makes old people wiser. Not always, mind you; sometimes older folks develop a bad taste in their mouths. Sometimes old folks look around and believe that nothing measures up to what they had experienced in their youth. There's a reason we have the cliché, "grumpy old men."

Life has its share of troubles and the elderly have both endured and seen more. Pessimism, cynicism, and a dour expression on the face – old-timers can get stuck in a bad mood. Again, some antiques come by it honestly. If tragedy befalls loved ones, if the bread-winner can no longer win the bread and a family struggles, if the young are called home early, if injustice haunts a home, if dreams have been left unrealized, if progeny show themselves to be spoiled, if, if, if. What had Simeon seen? Except for the brutality of World War II (60 million dead), chances are that Simeon had seen and experienced greater calamity than we have ever known. And there he is, waiting for the consolation of Israel. Hope and comfort and Divine action; it was promised to Simeon that it was coming – the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon. It had been revealed to him that his eyes would see the Lord's Christ before he would see death. And Simeon waited. What was Simeon's frame of mind?

It was the Passover that brought the infant Christ to the Temple. Mary and Joseph are devout and they would be determined to do for their son what is demanded in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12). The firstborn was to be consecrated to God. The blood of the lamb had protected the Israelites from the plague of death in Egypt. The blood of the lamb had protected the firstborn from death when the tenth plague swept through Egypt. Death passed over the homes where the blood of the lamb was smeared around the door. After that first, great Passover, the firstborn son was to be consecrated as a reminder of God's deliverance. God claimed the firstborn as His own. Israelites rejoiced to give to God their firstborn. A sacrifice would be offered to redeem the firstborn son. Fathers had been instructed to tell their sons this: "By a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals" (Exodus 13:14f.) So the faithful would sacrifice the firstborn animal but would redeem the firstborn son with a sacrifice. That's what Mary and Joseph are doing at the Temple.

The One who is the Redeemer of the world is Himself redeemed forty days after His birth. Jesus Christ is the firstborn of a new creation. His death will redeem humanity for the Father. His blood extends to the ends of the earth, bringing salvation, consolation for all who grieve,

consolation for all who fail, all who are weak and heavy laden. The Lord Christ is light in our darkness. He is hope in our despair. He is truth in the midst of our deceit. He is strength in our weakness, courage in our cowardice, and holiness come into our profane dystopia. And Simeon is there. An old man is there. An old man who is waiting for the consolation of Israel is there. And this old man rejoices. “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come” (Revelation 12:10). “Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” God’s promises find their exclamation, their fulfillment, their content in this infant boy. Simeon knew and his heart was a cup that runneth over. Words of praise perfectly capture what this Christ child will bring. God’s salvation; a light to lighten the nations; the glory of Israel; mine eyes have seen!

It’s true, of course, and you know it. God the Father had given His Son to the world and this Messianic King has brought salvation. A child, seemingly like any other, yet this truly mortal man is also truly eternal God. A body; a sacrificial Lamb; a holy and omnipotent instrument of salvation; God’s Christ had come. But what did Simeon see? What created joy in this geezer’s soul? Divine Love, Divine Commitment; Divine Solidarity; Divine Purpose; Divine Glory; are these *enough* for you or do you want more? Had Simeon’s mundane circumstance changed? What about the political landscape? Had that changed? And yet this gray-beard is elated, ecstatic, overjoyed about what God was doing. Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people. How exceptionally well do you know *those* words? Perhaps I’m being too subtle. Let’s hit it straight on. We’re too morose. We get our cues for our mood from the world and what it’s doing and not from God and what He’s doing. Joy is ebbing because we’re looking for it in the wrong place. Bank on this: the world is not going to become smarter, holier, wiser, or more just. If your mood is tied to whether or not the world is going to hell in a handbasket then you might as well get a lifetime supply of Prozac right now.

To be sure, there are real burdens that we must bear. Life forces us to address consequential issues that demand a strong response. Over 150 Christians were murdered on Christmas in Nigeria simply for being Christians. We will not trivialize such obscenity by pretending to be above it. Our crosses are real. We are to be, and we will be, salt and light. We have a Nigerian woman who is deeply loved and admired here at Christ the King and our heart goes out to her. Christians don’t stick their heads in the sand when it comes to public events but we don’t derive our hope, our joy from what the world does or doesn’t do. We are a part of a different kingdom. Christianity is the answer to every problem that we will ever face and it is not a tepid answer, not a wet-blanket answer, not a maudlin or flaccid answer. God’s Messiah came to address the heart of the human condition – my human condition and your human condition and all those you love – their human condition. Jesus is that Messiah. He lived a perfect life for every single one of us. This perfect man, who is truly God, willingly, lovingly sacrificed Himself, laying down His life for each one of us. He gave His life to elevate you above sin, to open heaven, to defeat death, to satisfy God’s justice. That’s our story. That’s the world’s story and there’s no way that this story ought to be relegated to a secondary position in your heart.

Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. Consolation implies difficulty. God’s masterpiece of a response to human difficulty is Christ crucified. Jesus grappled with every difficulty, every enemy known to man and was victorious. That is consolation. In His own human flesh, the Son of God rendered Himself up to the Father in our place, perfectly! That is

consolation. By His death and resurrection, we are heirs of His kingdom, sons and daughters by adoption, and we are headed to heaven. That is consolation. In this noisome world the peace of Christmas is yours, the triumph of Easter is yours, the hope of heaven is yours – that is consolation.

The world is cloaked in the darkness of unbelief. You are the light of the world. Confidence, trust, joy, and a perpetual witness to the God who is in charge of all things – that is what makes us valuable to the world. Our eyes see what the world does not see. Our eyes see the humility and, in that humility, the glory of our Savior. We see Immanuel, God with us, in this Divine Service, in the Word and the Sacraments, in the splendid life of faith that is lived out in this blessed body of believers. The church brings you joy. I know that is true. In this place there are an ark-load of old-timers who have good cheer, who love Christ and each other, and who embody blessed Simeon. We know that God doesn't forget us. We know that God is present, with us, full of love and grace and truth. To Him be glory forever and ever.