

He's Here... Now What?

[Luke 2:22-40](#)

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Today we will have one worship service - at 11 a.m.

We spend a lot of time waiting, don't we? We spend time waiting in traffic...in lines, and not too patiently, I might add. In Starbucks on Friday night, the man in front of me finagled a coupon for a free cup of coffee because he had to wait an extra minute and that was unacceptable. We spend time in waiting rooms...waiting for babies or diagnoses. We wait for relationships to get better...or to end. We wait and wait. Sometimes our hopes are realized. Often we just end up thinking, like Peggy Lee's song of despair, "Is that all there is?"

Let us pray: Lord God, we wait upon you as we yearn to hear speak to us from your Word. May your Holy Spirit do what we cannot do and make us thoughtful and willing listeners, for the sake of Jesus our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen. In our passage this morning, we see two very old people who had been waiting a long time for God to do something about the condition of the world...for God to do something about the sin-sickness of His people. And the amazing thing is that they see Jesus and realize that the very thing they had been waiting for had arrived and it was exactly what they had prayed for. This is a story worth looking into. And so, I ask you to take out your Bibles and turn to Luke chapter 2 and keep track of the story as we go through it.

It was easy to see Jesus last week. There were angels singing about him and telling shepherds exactly where to go to find him. There was a bright star guiding the wise men...a GPS without the subscription fees. But this week, it's not quite as easy to pick Jesus out in the crowd. Mary and Joseph have traveled the 6 miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in order to fulfill the Law and dedicate their firstborn son on the eighth day after his birth. They are at the Temple, but we need to understand that this didn't happen like our baptisms take place. We baptize our babies on schedule and in worship where the whole community is gathered to witness it.

This isn't how things happened in the Temple. You just came whenever the eighth day was and went to the priest on duty. So, Mary and Joseph meet Simeon in the outer courtyard, which is a busy and noisy place to be. Folks are bringing offerings of all sorts. Donkeys are braying, sheep are bleating and coins are clinging in Temple market. Nobody notices a young family...a poor young family just doing what all good Jews are supposed to do. This day is just like any other day in the Temple.

Yet, the moment Simeon and Anna see Jesus, they know immediately that he is God's promised Savior. How in the world, in the midst of all that busy-ness and noise did they know? How did the oldest people in the story become the first to see the newest gift of God? How can we be able to see Jesus when he enters our lives? That's not something we want to miss, is it? He's here...now what? But before we can answer that question it might be good to ask ourselves why Simeon and Anna were able to see what no one else did. How did they know?

Well, the story gives us a couple of hints as to what Simeon and Anna did that equipped them to see Jesus and know who he really was. Next week we will begin a sermon series on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Simeon and Anna are our first teachers, our first models of discipleship. So, what did they do? They put themselves, continually and for decades, in places where they could hear the voice of God. Let me say that again: They put themselves, continually and for decades, in places where they could hear the voice of God.

First, they were faithful at the Temple. The Temple, properly understood, was the place where people expected to meet God. The priests were there to relay the word of God to the people and the needs of the people to God. So, the Temple was the place of meeting. We so easily fall into a casual view of this building. We are so afraid, and rightly so, of turning a physical place into something that is holy in a magical way, that we do forget that this space has a purpose devoted to God. So, while this is not the only place, this indeed a place where one can meet God. People walk in here because it just looks like a place for that sort of thing.

I remember so vividly a Vespers Communion Service a few years back. A woman whom I had never seen before came forward for communion. She looked pretty beat up by life. I gave her the bread with the words, "This is the body of Christ, for you." She took the wafer and held it close, and with her eyes heavenward, she said, "O Jesus, you're here. You're really here." What faith. What vision. The presence of Jesus was so very real, not just to her, but to all around her who heard her words. How do we know? We come to this place for worship.

Secondly, Simeon and Anna were able to hear the voice of God because they were people of prayer. Simeon as a priest prays for the people and he is a man whose prayers are filled with gratitude and confidence in the promises of God. Anna not only prays, she does extreme praying by fasting. Her fasting shows us that she is making a counter-cultural statement. In a culture in which meals were a socially important event, she says, "No meal for me right now. Something's wrong in our world. Before you and God, I protest." How do we know? We pray.

And third, they were people who spent time in the word of God. They didn't read the word in order to master religious data. They searched the scriptures because they knew that that was where they would meet God.

In my first Hebrew class in seminary, the professor prefaced our time together with a string of lowered expectations. He said that he did not expect to find historical truth in the bible. He did not expect to find spiritual truths that would lead to doctrine. He did not expect certainties. Afraid that the class might not be worth the time, I asked, "But what do you expect to find there?" His reply? "I expect to find God." As much as I disagreed with much of his theology, it was undeniably true to me that he had met God in those pages. His life bore the marks of someone whose life had been changed by the Word of God.

Martin Luther, the Great Reformer, was driven by the question, "How do I find a merciful God?" He discovered the answer in the scriptures. The merciful God for whom he longed was found in the Jesus whom he met in the Bible. And so, he passionately assured his congregation that "Christ is found on every page of the scriptures." How do we know? Spend time in the scriptures. How do we know? We listen for Go... in worship together, in prayer and in the bible.

Earl Palmer, of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle and someone who has spoken at our All Church Retreat, tells the story of a New Mexico man and his son. They lived on a ranch and the sound of crickets was ever present. The father loved the sound of the crickets. They were like music to his ears. The son, however, was not particularly attached to ranch life and eventually left home to go to school. He ended up working in New York...a center of frenzy. His dad came to visit him and as they were walking along a busy mid-town street, the father stopped dead in his tracks and asked his son, "Did you hear that? It's a cricket!" The son couldn't believe it. After all, a cricket chirping can sound like a digital clock gone mad, right? He asked his dad, "How could you hear it?" His dad answered, "I've been listening for crickets all my life."

If you want to be able to see Jesus when he enters your busy life, you have to listen for him, just like Anna and Simeon. Because they spent their lives listening for God, they became people who were receptive to the voice of God. These were not cloistered people, unaware of the world swirling around them. They were very aware of that world and knew that the swirling was what was wrong. They knew that the world needed comfort. It needed to be set right. They prayed for its salvation and waited expectantly for it. They put themselves in places where they could hear the voice of God: in the temple, in an attitude of prayer, in the scriptures. When we do that, we, too, will be able to say, "He's here. My eyes have seen your salvation."

But then comes the 'so what?' question. You get the sense that when Anna and Simeon see Jesus, they kick into overdrive. They do not go into retirement. They don't say, "Jesus is here. I can take it easy." They are filled with an enviable energy and joy. They have been praying for God to save. They have been looking for a future when God would set things right. But now, seeing Jesus, they seem to focus on the present.

Simeon's prayer is rightfully interpreted to mean that he realizes that he can now die in peace, since God promised him that he would not die until he had seen the salvation of the Lord. He's seen it. Now he can die. But I think there's a lot more than resignation in this prayer. I think we can also understand Simeon to be saying, "Now that Jesus is here, I can stop waiting for salvation to come and I can do that with a sense of peace. I can now focus on what is happening today in the presence of that salvation." Simeon has a new focus in life. Now what? Move into God's purpose for you with a peace that will carry you through any conflict.

Anna does what all prophets and preachers do. She talks. She can't stop it. She has been called to be a prophet and now the word she can preach is very good news. When salvation comes you just can't keep the news to yourself. A couple of weeks ago, I was in Atlanta. Because of my negligence, my wallet was stolen and I didn't realize it until I was about ready to check in at the Delta counter. I needed to be back for Advent Vespers, so I really couldn't take a later flight.

I was in a real bind. In addition to the worry about credit card fraud and identity theft, I just had to get on my flight. Well, Delta agents and others dropped everything and got me on the flight and I was able to be here for Vespers. Then, after church, I found out that a man in Atlanta had confronted the thieves and rescued my wallet. He told me that my wallet seemed to have my whole life in it. He had never seen so many identification cards. He gave me my life back, as did all the others at the airport. I haven't stopped talking about that since it happened. Many of you have heard the story...many times...in detail. But that's what happens when you're saved. You talk about it.

Many of us get nervous when we think about talking about our faith. We don't understand it all and are afraid that we won't be able to explain the gospel in ways that will enable people to believe it. You know, that's not what we're called to do. What we are called to do is exactly what I did about my wallet, what Anna did about Jesus – we tell the story of what happened. We're like witnesses in a trial. We're not the judge, whose job it is to see that the law is followed or the advocates trying to convince a jury. We're the witnesses.

There's a great story out of the Wesleyan revival in England that illustrates this. There was a poor family in which the father drank to excess and all the money that could have been used to establish the home went toward beverages. But, he encountered Jesus Christ, gave his life to Him and it changed his life. His wife was telling this story to a neighbor, who was not a believer. In fact, he was quite the Enlightenment rationalist. He challenged the wife – "You don't really believe all that stuff about miracles, how Jesus changed water into wine, do you?" She responded, "I don't know about the water into wine, but this I do know...in our house, Jesus changed beer into furniture." Now what? Witness. Tell the story. Just like Anna.

But the thing that just really gets me in this story is buried in a little line in the 28th verse... "Simeon took him (Jesus) in his arms." This is not just tender. This is life changing. Embracing Jesus changes things. In order to embrace Jesus, you have to let go of, put down everything else that you're holding on to. You have to realize that Jesus is the only one worth holding on to and then hold on to him for dear life.

A little three-year-old boy was out playing in his front yard, when a couple of older boys pushed him into a climbing rose bush. The thorns pricked him all over his body. The pain was unbearable and he was inconsolable. His friends couldn't help, nor could his mother. He broke free of all their efforts to help and ran into his bedroom. He pulled the picture of Jesus off his wall and hugged it tightly, saying over and over, "Jesus, I hurt I hurt." Embracing Jesus was all that would do. Nothing else would get him through his pain.

When Simeon held Jesus, he knew that it wasn't just the baby of a peasant family, precious and important. He was holding salvation in his arms. When that 3 year old clutched that picture, it wasn't just a painting of a biblical character. He was embracing his only hope.

Jesus is here. Now what? Embrace Him...not ideas about Jesus...not works for Jesus, but Jesus himself. This will not make you a better person... that's the focus around each New Year. It will make you a new person – alive and restored in your relationship to God. But you will have to let go of everything else you hold on to, hoping that it will save you. All you can do is drop everything, push everything aside and embrace your only salvation

Only then, you discover one of the great truths in God's Kingdom, which overturns all our certainties: The moment you embrace Jesus, you discover that it is He who has been holding you all the time. Now what? Amen.