

*December 30, 2018*

*Luke 2:25-35: **“Standing with Such as Simeon”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christian writer Earl Palmer once wrote: “The leaders misread the signs. The baby born in the stable is not a sign of a weak and ineffectual king. But it is a sign of majesty who is secure and knows who He is. It’s a sign of love . . . the leaders of that time didn’t know anything about that. And so they missed it.” Indeed! If there was such a thing as a “spiritual insight meter,” most of the leaders at the time of Christ would have registered a ZERO. Almighty God was working out His purpose in their midst, but they were oblivious.

Some people go down all of life’s roads with their eyes closed! They look but they don’t “see.” They observe the surface but miss that which is underneath. Vision is present but perception is absent. It is that they are spiritually blind, deaf, and dumb and don’t even know it.

To this day so many are still missing it. This unbelieving world is having its “day.” But the unbelieving world’s day will come to a very abrupt and shocking end with the second arrival of Jesus. Where are we standing? Prayerfully, on this first Sunday after Christmas we are **Standing with Such As Simeon.**

Our Gospel lesson begins:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms . . . (Luke 2:25-28a)

Simeon was a “righteous and devout” man. What that means is that Simeon was a believer. He was looking forward to the Savior who was to come, and trusted in the righteousness and devotion of the coming Savior toward him. He believed that his sins were forgiven, and having been loved by God, he was in love. He was waiting to see the Savior with his own eyes, for it had been revealed to him that he would not die until after he had seen the arrival of the one promised to Adam and the woman.

It’s a rather overwhelming contrast, don’t you think? On the one hand, you have those who aren’t looking for it. Humanity caught up with its own agenda (Luke 17:27-29): “eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage . . . buying and selling, planting and building . . .” and totally unaware and completely uncaring of the truth that is right before them. And, then there is this one man by the name of Simeon, touched by the living God - eyes opened by faith - holding in his arms the Creator of the Universe, the Word of the Father in the flesh! In the arms of Simeon we see what the unbelieving world is missing.

And our Gospel lesson continues: “[Simeon] took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ‘Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your

salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

The angels had already said to the shepherds, “for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!” God’s Salvation was now in Simeon’s arms. What’s up with that word “salvation?” Simeon sees Jesus as the “one fitted to save,” or the fulfillment of all that has been said - the revelation of all that had been set forward in the Old Testament. Mary and Joseph, and we the readers of the gospel of Luke, are all aware of the miraculous circumstances surrounding Jesus birth, the trip to Bethlehem, the sign given to the shepherds, the angelic song, but now, in the temple at Jerusalem, Simeon confirms and builds upon that which is already known and believed. His testimony further leaves a powerful impression on all of us.

Who knows how many in the temple would have seen the holy family, and would have thought nothing of it? And here is Simeon to announce it. And, this unbelieving world is still missing it, for all are consumed with everything but the salvation that has been prepared in the presence of all peoples. It is still right before them, and yet, they are oblivious. The light continues to shine in the darkness, but mankind loves the darkness instead of the light because their deeds are evil, just as Jesus says, “For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed (John 3:19-20).” What a blessing it is then that we, who fall under the same verdict as this unbelieving world, are nevertheless, **Standing with Such as Simeon** this morning to ponder in our hearts his words. What he saw with his own two eyes, we see through the eyes of faith. He bears witness to all that is to be found in this baby. In the words of one Lutheran writer (Mark Beutow):

Now you haven’t held baby Jesus in your arms like Simeon but you have Christ come to you in these ways: in the water and Word of the holy font; in the absolution and preaching of your pastor; in the Word given in the Scriptures; in His own body and blood given in His Supper. Here in these gifts, Christ saves you. Forgives you. Prepares you for death and gives you the gift of everlasting life. I don’t know what is going to happen to you when you walk out that door. I hope and pray that each of you live a long and happy life and fall asleep peacefully in Jesus at a good old age. But we all know that anything can happen. And whether it’s an accident or disease, or something else, death is there. So before you get up and walk out that door, I shall tell you these words after the Sacrament: “Depart in peace.”

And that is what those who love the darkness are missing. Are you ready to depart in peace? May we always be **Standing with Such as Simeon**. To hold Jesus in his arms in our day is to hold him by faith. And when we say “depart in peace” after communion, you are to understand that this means that you have true peace with God, the same peace in the angelic song at the birth of our Savior. To depart in peace means that it is OK to die! Simeon tells us that when you have Christ, sin, death and the power of the devil mean nothing! In the Savior, there is nothing but peace that sins are forgiven, and there is nothing to fear beyond the grave. No wonder then that it is truly startling to think that the unbelieving world would prefer to live distracted by the down here, having no regard concerning sin and death. But we should not be surprised at these things, for Simeon not only encourages us, but warns us as well.

Our Gospel lesson closes (Luke 2:33-35): “And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.’” Most of the world will never love or like Jesus, nor will they love or like us. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?”

To those who see what sin is and the death and hell it brings, Christ is the one who has overcome sin, death and hell. Who we are and the Gospel we present is “the fragrance of life.” But, to those who are convinced that they are basically good, and have a right to do whatever they want, and establish their kingdom in this world, the Savior is a foul odor. Thanks be to God, we may declare with Paul, “Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere (2 Cor. 2:14).”

On this first Sunday after Christmas we stand with Simeon and we echo his words: “Our eyes of faith have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all people!” And so, he stands there; the man called Simeon - this insignificant person in the eyes of this unbelieving world - standing there in the midst of this unbelieving world’s noise and turmoil, just as we stand with Jesus holding the Word and the Sacraments. What a blessing it is that we have been given eyes to see (hearts of faith) to behold the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ. Simeon - just a man - one of us - and we are most blessed to stand with him knowing that like him, we may depart in peace!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott