

December 31st 2017

Scripture:

Psalm 148

Isaiah 61:10-63:3

Luke 2:22-40

“God continues to reveal Himself.”

The poet Ann Weems writes ----- in ---- “It is not Over” ---

It is not over
the birthing.

There are always newer skies
into which
God can throw stars.

When we begin to think
that we can predict the Advent of God,
that we can box the Christ
in a stable in Bethlehem,
that’s just the time
that God will be born
in a place that we can’t imagine or won’t believe.

Those who wait for God
watch with their hearts and not just their eyes
listening
always listening
for angel words.”

God continues to reveal Himself.

And as Weems rightly notes ---- it is often in places --- and in ways --- that
we can’t imagine or believe --- that God chooses to reveal Himself.

Knowing that God is forever unwrapping His will for us ---- we do well to
keep our focus on Him and things above.

It may be years --- we may have to wait year after year after year --- but when we wait patiently for God there is always an answer --- and direction.

And our Gospel passage today stands as a powerful testament to this truth.

In Luke's Gospel today Jesus is presented at the Temple according to the Law of Moses.

Essentially Mary and Joseph com to the temple to make the appropriate sacrifice offering and to have Jesus circumcised.

And when Jesus is presented ----- 2 faithful servants of God --- who have waited ---- and waited --- and waited patiently for God ---- find fulfillment -- - and God comes through on the promises He made to them.

First there is Simeon --- picking it up at verse 25 from Luke's Gospel today -

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“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.”

Simeon waited --- and waited --- and waited.

God had revealed to him that one day in his lifetime the Messiah would be presented at the temple.

And that day finally arrived.

Finally Simeon sees with his own eyes --- and as verse 28 says --- Simeon takes the child in his arms.

Picking it up at verse 28 ---

“Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:
“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,”

Imagine the great relief Simeon must have felt that day.

God has fulfilled His promise --- Simeon can die in peace --- and even more important than this ---- Salvation has finally come to the world.

“You may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,” --- Simeon says.

When we wait patiently for God --- He always comes through.

It may be years --- we may have to wait year after year after year --- but when we wait patiently for God there is always a response.

God continues to reveal Himself.

The movement of God isn't just a thing of the past.

Written about in the Good Book --- ancient words ---- scripture.

And the movement of God isn't just a thing for the future ---- when Jesus comes again.

The movement of God is ever present.

Day and night --- night and day ----- day after day after day after day -----
Anna waited for God to reveal Himself.

“There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.
She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

And then it finally happens ---- all that waiting finally comes to fruition ---- and the long awaited child is presented.

And both Simeon and Anna immediately connect the baby with the consolation of Israel and the redemption of Israel.

Their patience and trust finally bear visible fruit.

Their lives remind us just how patient we sometimes have to be.

And their lives remind us what trust looks like.

And their lives remind us about dependency and obedience.

And they are not just rose coloured glasses that they look through ---- “All will be well ----- it will all be jolly and fun --- and feel good.”

No ----- Simeon is a realist ----- he is well aware of the rejection and resistance that will follow Jesus His whole life.

He says to Mary ---- and remember Mary has just presented her little baby boy --- maybe 8 days old or so --- to the priests.

Mary has just brought her first born boy forward ----- Simeon has just finished singing His praises --- and then he says this ----

“Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Simeon has seen the glory of God --- he has seen the consolation and redemption of Israel --- he has seen the light for revelation to the Gentiles --- -- and he also knows that this glory --- this consolation --- this redemption -- - this Messiah will be rejected by so many.

He knows that the Christ will be plagued with difficulty wherever He goes.

And so he says to the child's mother Mary ----- "and a sword will pierce your soul too."

Simeon knows that it will be a difficult and challenging life for Mary and for her boy.

Simeon knows that when God reveals Himself --- as he will do over and over and over again through this baby ----- there will be challenges and resistance and inflexibility and pride.

And so Simeon says it plainly ---- this child will be ----- "spoken against." -- - and "rejected".

And of course this is precisely what happens.

And of course this is precisely the case right from the get go --- literally the very first time Jesus utters a word in the synagogue --- He is challenged and spoken against --- see Mark chapter 1.

The revelation of God --- at least initially ----- is rarely ever greeted --- favourably and warmly.

And so unfortunately --- sometimes the message of God --- the revelation of God never even gets a chance to unfurl its wings.

But thankfully --- there are always also those with a far deeper and abiding trust and faith.

Thankfully there are also those who welcome the word of God --- who listen --- who wait --- and are not afraid to conform to it ----- regardless of how it makes them feel.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not a message about feelings it is a message about following.

Simeon says --- “Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There’s no warm fuzzy feeling for Mary here.

Simeon doesn’t say --- “You Mary are the mother of a great prophet --- or a great teacher ----- so you can feel good about this.”

Instead what he says is --- “You Mary are the mother of the Saviour of Israel ---- through your son will come the redemption of Israel ---- and just so you know --- a sword will pierce your soul too.”

It’s going to be painful ---- for Mary and for Jesus --- Simeon knows this ---- - and so he doesn’t mess around --- he gets right to the point with Mary.

“And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” --- he says.

Mary has just brought her little baby to the temple for the first time --- and yet she gets this rather harsh news.

As Christians we know that the will of God can sometimes seem harsh.

We know that the Gospel isn’t just sunshine and butterflies.

And we know this because the Gospel is about salvation --- reconciliation --- - redemption ---- and fulfillment.

The Gospel is about change --- and change is never smooth ----- Jesus brought change and look how bumpy the road he walked was.

As human beings we tend to be run by inertia --- a state of little or no change.

Inertia --- the tendency to remain --- or continue in our existing state --- unchanged.

Inertia --- the tendency to remain unchanged ---- unchanged except by external force.

The tendency to remain unchanged ---- except by external force --- that's inertia and that is the predominant human condition --- and disposition.

Thankfully God knew this --- that's why He came in Christ ---- He's the external force that changes human inertia.

The state of our spiritual lives --- is to basically remain unchanged unless God changes us.

We cannot changes on our own --- not the kind of change that God desires for us.

We need an external force --- to change ---- we need God's directive --- God's hands --- God's will and direction to change.

If God could have changed things without having to step down into His creation He would have --- but He knew He had to step down and into the mud and grime and real life circumstances of this world in order to exact the kind of change He desired.

And it is still the very same today as it was when God stepped down into His creation in Jesus Christ.

There are still those like Simeon and Anna ----- who are called to wait patiently and proclaim faithfully ---- and there are still those who are basically run by inertia --- stay the same --- keep everything moving in the same basic direction.

Waiting patiently for God --- attending on the will of God is not the same as being run by inertia --- keeping things the same --- continuing in an existing state of uniform motion.

Waiting on God --- attending on God --- is the most inertia breaking shackle shattering activity a human being can ever engage in.

It takes every ounce of energy we have --- and of course like the cross itself it's a paradox it gives every ounce of energy we have.

It's counter culture --- it's counter intuitive --- it isn't run on feelings or emotions --- it is run by God.

As Christians --- as people of faith who believe that God is still revealing Himself to us --- we live --- or at least ought to live ---- in a great state of constant anticipation and expectation.

We don't live run by inertia ----- or trapped by inertia.

Simeon and Anna in Luke's Gospel today ---- got up everyday with a great and heightened sense of anticipation and expectation --- "Today just may be the day that God fulfills --- God reveals ----- God shows up and speaks --- and changes things."

And to be clear they weren't adrenalin junkies ----- and they weren't emotion junkies either --- looking for the next adrenaline high or emotional high --- feeling great for a little while from something generated inside of themselves.

Rather they were anticipating and expecting God to act and reveal Himself --
- fulfill the promises He had made to them.

They steadily and faithfully walked against the grain --- they longed for divine intervention and they knew that one day it would come ---- and finally it did.

They went to the temple everyday with eyes and hands and hearts and dispositions of the soul wide open.

They were calmly and faithfully and humbly ---- forever ready for God to act and reveal and fulfill.

There was no sense of being trapped or run by inertia in their lives.

Revelation --- change coming from an outside source --- the very will of God was the life energy that sustained them --- not boring old --- earthbound inertia.

To go through everyday --- when everyday kind of looks the same --- to go through everyday ----- patiently and humble and faithfully anticipating and

expecting God to act suddenly definitively at some point --- takes great faith and trust --- and obedience --- perseverance.

Simeon and Anna appear before the wise men do.

We'll hear about the wise men next week ---- we three kings and gold and frankincense and myrrh.

But for today ---- forget the wise men ---- Simeon and Anna get it first.

Maybe this year we'll add two figures to our crèche scenes --- Simeon and an Anna.

Fewer and fewer are those who are patient and trusting and obedient enough to stick with God --- and look into an unknown future with Him.

Waiting patiently for God is rare --- most of the time we prefer familiarity.

Few are the Simeon's and Anna's who attend on God day in and day out.

And then again ---- blessed are we by the Simeon's and Anna's who attend on God day in and day out and show us the better way.

Sometimes all it takes is one or two people to make a whole room --- or a whole community --- or a whole church to glow and beam with a great sense of trust and humility and obedience.

When Jesus first appeared at the temple --- as a wee baby ---- there were at least 2 people who were in tune with the movement of God.

I don't know about you that is a Word of great encouragement to me.

That is one of the beautiful things about the movement of God ---- there is almost always a couple of people that lead the way for the rest of us --- people that are trusting --- and humble and --- obedient enough to pull the rest of us away from our inertia ---- our natural tendency to simply follow the ebb and flow of whatever is happening around us --- our feelings.

God continues to reveal Himself to us and not through our feelings ---- but through our obedience.

Simeon and Anna were obedient.

When we are obedient God blesses us.

That all the distractions around and within us in this world cannot totally blind us or obscure from us the self revelation of God ---- is cause for great joy.

We live in this world --- but we are not of this world.

We have another home --- glimpses of which God provides.

We're not to get all caught up in the foolishness of this world --- Simeon and Anna didn't --- they kept their focus on the will of God.

God blesses us with great and faithful examples that draw us up beyond just ourselves and beyond just our wants and needs.

Simeon and Anna remind us to set our sights on things above.

Simeon and Anna remind us to set our sights on what God is doing --- not what we are doing for God ---- but on what God is doing.

In 2018 ----- and beyond may we focus on what God is doing.

In 2018 ---- and beyond ---- may our sights be set on things above.

Like Simeon --- like Anna --- may we too be obedient and wait patiently on the Lord.

Amen.