

Presentation of Christ in the Temple, January 28th 2018.

Luke 2:22-40 main passage.

Also Hebrews 2:14-end.



²⁹ 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.'

³⁰ *For my eyes have seen your salvation,* ³¹ *which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:* ³² *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.* (Luke 2:29-32)

The old Simeon, meets the holy family - Mary and Joseph - who have come to Jerusalem for the customary religious rite of Purification. He speaks the beautiful words we know as the Nunc Dimittis which gets its title from the Latin of the opening phrase translated as: "Now, Dismiss". It has been part of evening and night prayer for centuries - one of the gospel canticles sung each evensong in Anglican worship. These are words of prophecy and praise by Simeon over the baby Jesus as held in his arms, while Mary and Joseph look on and listen.

Let's be encouraged by some of the words he says

1.Sovereign Lord. It is often translated "Master", or simply "Lord". Master is where it begins. When we become Christians we invite God, through Jesus, to become both Lord and Saviour of our lives. We not only look to him for forgiveness of our sins through Christ's atoning death on the cross. We open our lives up to him, asking him to be lord over our time, our money, our ambitions, our thoughts, our words and our actions. To say to the Lord God, "Master" whatever you ask I will do, wherever you send me I will go."

Simeon praises God that the task *he was given*, is now completed. His duty was to keep watch, so to speak, through the long dark night, to wait for the rising of the sun (Luke 1:78-79), and then to announce it. The hours of

waiting and watching are over, he sees the light in all its brightness, he announces it and now says he can be discharged - he has done what he was asked to do. His last duty of his life. He can now die in peace.

His was a task of waiting. He has been faithful to the Master, as the Master has been faithfully fulfilling the promises made. Faithful to the Master, no matter how long the task takes or how hard it is. At the beginning of any calling from the Lord, there can be the enthusiasm of something exciting, new, dynamic. Maybe Simeon felt that way, when the Spirit first spoke to him - "Wow I am going to see the Messiah!"

Can you imagine the joy? How would you have felt? Not that the Messiah is coming in your generation, but, more, **you will see him!**

But was this when he was a teenager, your age, my age...? When the enthusiasm wears off, the challenge to keep faithful, to keep loyal to keep going. If you are someone, who is finding it hard to keep going, to keep faithful to that task or callings he has called you to, maybe it is time to come for prayer - prayer ministry, or ask those in the home group to pray with you.

You know, I think prayer ministry at times, can be seen as admitting we are weak and maybe we don't want to do that. Especially here where many people can see you come for prayer. Well, if we are happy to be seen as weak we are in very good company. Jesus could have gone to Gethsemane and not taken anyone. He wanted that human company but he allowed them to see his battles and

struggles in those moments. And Paul, who talks about the thorn in his flesh and then declares - how he had come to realise

"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak I am strong."

(2 Corinthians 12:vv9-10).

2.Simeon says: 'For my eyes have seen'. He sees this 40 day old. "To see Jesus is to see God's salvation in flesh and blood "(theologian Darrell Bock, as indicated in Hebrews 2:v14). There can be joy even as death is faced when one has seen the source of life.

"Our people die well", Revd John Wesley said - the Christians he ministered to, had seen God's salvation, seen the source of life, and there was joy and peace, as death approached. Simeon has seen - with his own two eyes. But Simeon has also been enabled to see - the Spirit which has moved him, spoken to him, enables him to **see** that this baby is the Messiah. He recognises God's long promised king, in this bundle in the arms of Mary and Joseph. He sees salvation is embodied in this baby. **He sees.**

We - us - have come to see also. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:vv3-6

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake. For God, who said "Let light shine out of darkness", made his light to shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

We are enabled to see Christ for who he truly is.

But Paul reminds us that there is a spiritual battle, declaring earlier that the god of this age - Satan -

"blinds the minds of those who do not believe so they cannot see the light of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."

There is a spiritual battle. Proclaiming the faith - which we are called to do until Christ returns - is more than about clarity, good relevant presentation and passion. There is an enemy who seeks to keep anyone from believing and trusting in Christ. So being aware of Paul's words drives us to our knees, to pray for eyes of non believers to be opened.

But do we need to pray anything else? Paul in Colossians 4 and Ephesians 6, knows proclaiming the faith is his and every Christians' role - so he asks those congregations to pray *he will* take opportunities and he will be bold and clear. We pray the same, that we can guide people towards discovering who Christ is, as Simeon was moved to enter

the temple, but we pray that eyes can be opened, to recognise Jesus is God's salvation.

3.'Your salvation which you have prepared in sight of all peoples.' Salvation here seems to have two parts. Light of revelation to the Gentiles. Glory of your people Israel.

Not just his people Israel, Simeon declares. "All peoples" salvation is meant for everyone, Gentile and Jews. It is a salvation for all people. That is a theme of Epiphany. We began with the wise men reminding us how Christ has come for all. As Isaiah reminds us in 52:v10

"The LORD will laid bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God."

That covers ... like everyone!

That means as I bicycle back, the people I see, all the people I meet, , God longs for them to discover his salvation, to see as Simeon did. That means as I walk down my street, and look at these nice houses, where they do not know Christ, God longs for them to recognise Christ is not just part of the heritage of this country, something historical but so much more.

Statistics are tricky things. But 46% of the population would claim to have some connection to Christianity, but really only around 10% have a living faith it is suggested. In the last survey, 50% declared they had no religion - so

therefore agnostic or atheistic. You can see, I believe, part of our task, the Master asks, to help people in the Netherlands to see. And perhaps that begins, where we work, study, live, do they know we are Christians? To even know that, is an act of witness, when over 50% of the country do not have any living connection to Christianity. Simeon's words are so relevant - he says Jesus is a light of revelation to the Gentiles - that word, revelation, has meaning about 'opening up, something previously unknown' and there are many who know nothing about Jesus.

Jesus is the glory of Israel. For Israel, God's people, Jesus is glory. Jesus fulfils the promises made by God and shows Israel's special place in his heart.

Isaiah 46:13 reminds us:

'I am bringing my righteousness near, it is not far away; my salvation will not be delayed. I will grant salvation to Zion my splendour to Israel.'

Chapter 60:1-3

'Arise shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of the dawn.'

Salvation for everyone, Light of Revelation, and Glory...

Conclusion: Nunc Dimittis is a very moving set of words. But Simeon says more. His next words show how, as Epiphany comes to an end, it is pointing us towards Lent, to how this salvation is possible, to the future of this baby, how victory is achieved through pain, how atonement for sins (Hebrews 2:17) comes through suffering, how God's love for all will be shown. There will be the "falling and rising of many in Israel" (v34), Simeon says. Jesus will divide Israel in two - some will accept and welcome him, others will not. Simeon says he will be "a sign spoken against" (v34) - people will be against him and his followers. To identify with Jesus will bring pain. And he says to Mary - her own soul will be pierced by a sword (v35) - a mother, years later, who will stand and watch her son die.



So as we come for Communion today I want us to think: **how thankful** that we have seen God's salvation in Jesus - the ones who pointed us to the way, who shared the stories, and thankful to God that our eyes were opened. As you are in that queue - thank God for him opening your eyes and the ones he used...

As we prepare to receive, as we see Christ who is and will be the glory of Israel, **remember** again what it cost for that glory...

As you prepare to receive bread and wine, of how this matters to you, as we remember the crucifixion of Christ, let

us **remember** again the ones for whom it matters nothing - over 50% of this nation - let us cry out to God for those who need the light of revelation...

And as we come to front, remember the Words of Simeon - Master - as **Christ modelled for us what it meant to be a servant**, to submit to his heavenly father, as we take bread and wine, we not only say thank you for what it means but we are **committing** to live the life Christ calls us to live and modelled to us... to be faithful to the end, to fight the good fight, to run the race, keep the faith, no matter what.

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Silent prayer.

Amen.

Revd Grant Crowe