

Candlemass. Luke 2:22-40, Malachi 3:1-5 (January 31st 2021)

Holy Spirit speak... take from the Father and Son and reveal what we need to hear today. Amen.



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Can you imagine, a sunny day, Jerusalem. The temple area. People are coming and going, it is busy. Some rich people pass through with their friends. Soldiers of Rome are keeping alert. Animals and birds are sold. Beggars wait for assistance from those visiting. The elderly sit in the shade of a tree or in the cover of a doorway...And into this come Mary and Joseph. A young couple, unnoticed by most people there, enter with a 40 day old boy, their firstborn, as they carry two pigeons. So begins our gospel reading. We notice the people present, Joseph and

Mary, Simeon, Anna, baby Jesus, but we also note, the unseen yet very present, person of the Holy Spirit.

This week and the next two Sundays we will focus upon Hearing God's voice.

I love how the rabbis remind us that everyone word in the scriptures is important, it matters, why it is there, for God intended it to be there... About Simeon Luke chooses to include the statements: to describes Simeon's piety – righteous and devout (similar words for Elizabeth and Zechariah), how he was watching and waiting for the Lord's coming to his temple – as Malachi 3 says.

But note what Luke adds:

- 1.the Holy Spirit was upon him,
- 2.second, that it had been revealed – we'd call this charismatic revelation – that he would see the Messiah, the Christ before he dies.
- 3.third, he was moved to enter the courts. It was not an accident or coincidence but a God incidence, a divine appointment. In that appointment there is revelation once again – the baby is the Christ.
- 4.And fourthly, we have prophetic utterance – what we now call the Nunc Dimittis and the words to Mary.

Luke has chosen these verses, recorded them, to shape us and inform us.

1. "And the Holy Spirit was upon him."

The Spirit was upon Simon. It is an ongoing possession. Now, Elizabeth and Zechariah are filled by the Spirit but it seems to spontaneously happen. Here the Spirit is upon Simeon. In the Old Testament the Spirit was with people, upon people, for particular tasks for particular times. So, prophets, leaders, kings, the judges, people like Gideon and Samson. There are craftsmen gifted to build the items for the tabernacle. The Spirit would give revelation (insight), wisdom, prophetic speech, inspire praise or worship, and also could give power to bring liberty from oppression. So in one manner, Simeon is like the examples in the Old Testament, the Spirit rests on people for particular people for certain tasks. It could therefore be suggested – was the Spirit upon Simeon for this moment in the temple.

But when we read of Simeon, it grabs our attention because we see the Spirit at work in a similar way to what we read in Acts don't we? Spirit upon a believer, hearing the Spirit's voice, being led by the Spirit, the Spirit working through Simeon to guide and build believers. He is the only person who is mentioned in such a manner in the Gospel of Luke, except for Jesus.

So, is Simeon described in such detail to us, for we are also to learn from him, as Christians to whom the Spirit has been given. Romans 8 – if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.' We who have been given the Spirit, learn from one who also was given the Spirit.

2. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.'

It has been revealed to him by the Spirit – charismatic revelation. How, it may have been through a dream, a vision, a word. The OT shows a range of ways the Lord speaks. It was a private revelation to him.

However it came, Simeon knew the Spirit speaking to him. And he is given a huge promise – you will not die before you see the Messiah. Not that he will hear about him. But he will *see him*.

Listening to the voice of the Spirit. I believe we have the Spirit is within us, and I believe he wants to speak to us. It begins with expectancy that he does want to speak, or can speak.

You know I remember when I went on my very first ever retreat – I was exploring if I was called to be ordained. I went arrived. And at meal time they told me a bit of a shock, that they assumed I was on silent retreat and wouldn't speak to me the whole week unless at meals...I am chatty and love to talk and that was a blow! When I saw them, not a word, maybe a simile. Yet at meal time, they'd chat and tell me about their work as Anglican nuns. The Spirit – he isn't like the nuns when I was on retreat – he hasn't said, I'm not going to speak to Grant. He doesn't say I'm only speaking to archbishops, holy people, priests and popes. Instead, just like I was sure the nuns would speak at meal times, and I could look forward to it and expect it, we can look forward to it expect the Spirit to speak to us. That is the start.

Our Scripture assume God speaks. The bible opens with God speaking – let there be light! As soon as humanity appears, God is speaking to them – the walk in the garden seems normal, and

Adam totally gets that God speaks and knows the voice when he hears 'where are you?' God speaks to Adam, Eve, to their son Cain; he speaks to Noah, to Abraham, to the patriarchs – at various places in their spiritual walk with him, from Moses to Malachi, he speaks, with often the prophets recorded as thundering 'thus says the Lord'.

He has spoken to our world, through Jesus.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter says, and it is important to take that promise seriously : "Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off!" *That means us.*

And it is through the Spirit's gift of tongues that day – that the city is alerted to this truth...

Scripture reminds us – the God who loves to speak – is now dwelling in each believer by his Spirit. It is striking that when Paul describes the gifts of the Spirit, a number of them enable us to hear God speaking or discern what he is doing.

And in the final book of the Bible – Revelation, 60 years after Pentecost: Jesus says "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Scripture points us to this fact from beginning to end. "The Living God, who lives in all believers, by His Holy Spirit, is a God who speaks." (Lawrence, pg25).

The experience of God speaking – in various means as scripture notes - at times the Spirit invades, butts in, like it appears he

does with Elizabeth and Zechariah. However, just like we set aside time for prayer – like Anna who was constantly at the temple following we assume the three set times for prayer – we should set aside time to listen.

Our personal prayers can become simply – we bring to God our agenda, and our shopping list – say Amen, and then get up without waiting for an answer. Instead we add time, to ask the Lord. Who would you like me to pray for today, I have my list what is on yours? This is my diary for today, Lord, do you have plans instead of or to add in?

I don't know how you are ending these online services. Maybe, like our home, you watch, service ends, music plays and switch off the tv or laptop. Of course for parents you may have been juggling your kids all this time. But a suggestion. To pause at the end of the service – maybe like we did when we were meeting in Kosmik – and keep some silence. "Lord, what are you drawing my attention about, is there wisdom in what Grant said – yes there could be! – Lord, is there a scripture or a line of this song. Lord is there something you want me to particularly take away and concentrate upon this week...

Depending on that comes to mind, it may be something simple, it may be something to share with a trusted Christian friend or in your Life Group. If you are with your spouse, why not share that? If with kids who can be still, ask them... Of course, you may get the answer 'what is for lunch?' but you may also get 'that reminded me of that boy in my class, or of aunt x'. And from that, it possible to turn it into prayer. Sometime the Lord may speak – not for some earth shattering life changing decision – but for that day, that week, that person pray for them.

3.Moved by the Spirit.

The phrase is very close, in the original language, to Luke 4:1 'Jesus full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness. ' (NASB).

Simeon is moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents bring the baby, he knows this is the Messiah. But think – he comes into the courts at the right time – without that phrase maybe Theophilus, the first ever person to read this gospel – thought 'wow that was lucky!' Luke is clear – Simeon is led by the Spirit to go in. You can call that not a coincidence but a Divine incidence or a divine appointment. We don't know – was Simeon aware of the Spirit saying go "He is there!", or did he get a nudge, something in his soul, go for a walk in the courts, talk to that couple over there? Frustrating we do not know! A question when we remember to ask him when we see him in the future new heaven and new earth!

Have we experienced that – that nudge which doesn't go away, to ring or email someone? Does this open up an idea that God may be at work in our lives or surroundings in ways perhaps at first we don't imagine. How does it change things to think – that when I get on a train, perhaps that person opposite me, is not because it was seat free, but perhaps God at work?

In November, Michael Harvey preached at All Saints. In October, he ran a group when I attended. At that sermon, and also in the group, he encouraged each of us – over 3 weeks – to pray a simple prayer: 'Lord, who outside of the church family, do you want me to connect with today?' When a name came to mind, we were to ask them a simple question 'How are you doing?'

So. As the group met each week, he would ask us, what happened? For some of us, there was a name which lingered in our mind, and we made contact. For others, some weeks, there was no name, but in fact they bumped into someone and helped them or had a meaningful conversation. The acronym he used was : ACORN – Ask God, Call – the name that will likely come to mind – O – obey, if we asked, we should go for it; R – Report, report back, we tell another about it; N – notice God was doing, in us, in the person.

I think of a member of All Saints – who after hearing Michael preach, prayed that prayer on the Sunday, and immediately a name came to mind. So they had prayed, asked – a name came to mind – so he obeyed – he rang the person. He said the person was really glad he rang.

So as Christians with the Spirit, we want to sensitive to that leading of the Spirit.

4. Simeon took him his arms ... he blessed them and said to Mary.

Simeon - the Spirit upon him, he is open to charismatic revelation, he is open to charismatic guidance – being led - and finally he declares prophecy.

Simeon says what we call the Nunc Dimittis. Simeon has had the Spirit speak to him personally – privately – ‘he would not die before he would see the Lord’s Christ’. Now he shares prophecy. He *hears the Spirit for others*.

If you were Theophilus, a Roman official, you can imagine, he asks - is Christ for me? And here Simeon declares, following Isaiah 49, "yes, he is for the Jewish nation, and he is for all other nations." He hears and also speaks to Mary about her son and the pain that will come to her.

At this point, it is enough to say, as we seek to hear God's voice, it may be private – for you alone (your prayers, your agenda, perhaps even a new direction in your life or a new commitment); but it possible as we hear the voice of the Spirit, he will give you something for someone else.

At Michael's group, an old friend – we used to lead a bible study together – came to mind. We hadn't been in contact for years. I asked how they were etc. We reconnected. Good chat. A few weeks later, they got Corona, found it hard breathing etc. They asked me to pray for them. Would they have contacted me to pray for them, if we had not reconnected?

One time I was praying, I prayed asking if there was a bible verse I could encourage my friend with. A verse from the psalms came to mind. Good verse. I passed it along, just saying – I was praying for you again and this verse came to mind'.

I think at times, hearing God's voice, maybe we can scale it up, that it is always about life changing, life challenging words. It can be. But I believe it can also be simply – the Spirit seeks to speak, something upbuilding, encouraging, comforting, edifying, for that day, for that week for that person...

Conclusion.

In the midst of this lovely beautiful gospel scene, Luke, points us to Simeon.

Simeon a man of piety and watching and waiting,
a man who had the gift of the Spirit,
who was also open to hearing God's voice, open to the Spirit's
revelation to him,
who was led by the Spirit
and open to the Spirit speaking through him.

A man for us to learn from. Amen.

Prayer.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of your Spirit.
We ask that we would learn to hear however and whenever you
seek to speak to us.
Help us to grow in wisdom and discernment and to be
expectant.
Lead us daily by your Spirit
And may be used by you to share your words with others.
In Jesus name.
Amen.