

My Eyes Have Seen
Pastor Jonna Bohigian
Luke 2:22 – 40

Dear friends in Christ, “grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:2). Amen.

As we gather in worship this last Sunday of 2017 and prepare to ring in the New Year, I encourage you to reflect on these questions. (Pause between each.) Who was the most interesting person you met this year? Who served you this year? Through whom did you receive hope? In whom did you see God? Did any of these people surprise you?

In our Gospel text this morning, we encounter a would-be routine story, but it is perhaps as surprising as your reflections. The *routine* story would sound like this: forty days after a Jewish baby boy’s birth, his family would travel to the temple in Jerusalem. If the baby boy were the firstborn, he would be called holy to the Lord and the parents would redeem him, or buy him back, for five shekels.¹ The baby would then not serve as a priest. His mother would present an offering to atone for *herself*, to make herself right with God. If she could afford it, she would offer a lamb and a turtledove or pigeon. If she didn’t have much money, she would offer two turtledoves or two pigeons. End of story.

Instead, and perhaps we’re not surprised, Jesus’ story is different. His family travels to Jerusalem so that he will be called holy to the Lord, but we don’t hear of Jesus’ parents redeeming him. And perhaps Jesus *isn’t* redeemed by his parents, which would mean that though he returns with his parents and lives in their family,

¹ Joel Green, *Luke*, 142.

“Jesus really belongs in God’s house and in God’s family.”² His mother, Mary, does not have much money, and so she offers two turtledoves or two pigeons.

Before Jesus’ presentation and Mary’s offering take place, they are interrupted. They are interrupted by a man named Simeon. Now Simeon is a devout man, a man who does what is right before God. He is a man of reputable character, so Mary and Joseph welcome his interruption. The Holy Spirit is upon him and has revealed to him that he *will not* die before he sees the Lord’s Messiah. He sees Jesus, takes him up in his arms, blesses God, and says that beautiful prayer we often hear in funerals: 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” (Lk 2:29 – 32). Simeon blesses God for fulfilling His promise. Simeon has *seen* God’s salvation, which will be for *all* people, Jews *and* Gentiles.

Simeon then blesses Mary and Joseph and says to her, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed” (Lk 2:34b). Simeon’s word to Mary seems like unusual, unwanted words for a new mother to hear. Simeon prophesies that Jesus will be divisive among his own people; he will cause some to fall and others to rise. He will be a sign of opposition. Jesus’ life will be one of conflict.³

Simeon continues, “A sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:35). Both Mary and Jesus will suffer.

² Tim Geddert, *Luke*, 32.

³ Joel Green, *Luke*, 149.

Mary and Joseph are *then* interrupted by a woman named Anna. Anna is also a faithful Jew, an old prophetess, who has lived many years a widow. She is *also* a reliable person. Anna does not leave the temple, and prays and fasts night and day. With her fasting, she has lived in protest, that “all is *not* well.”⁴ And yet, “coming up at that very hour she [begins] to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who [are] waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38). In the baby Jesus, Anna gives thanks to God and shares the news of Jesus with other Jews who are waiting for their redemption.

Simeon and Anna are not normally a part of these presentation stories. And yet, here they are, in Jesus’ story. Two devout Jews who trust God’s promises that God *will redeem* His people. And in Jesus, they “recognize...the advent of God’s redemptive intervention in the world.”⁵ They break out in praise to God.

Simeon and Anna *see* Jesus, the Savior promised through Israel. They see the one to save the world, and the world’s salvation will be accomplished through conflict and pain. He will be opposed by many, and his mother will suffer, too.

All this regarding a baby forty days old. That God would choose to bring salvation through His only Son, who was born a vulnerable baby, who would grow up and cause division and suffer and die, is unfathomable. “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19 – 20). This baby was for Anna and Simeon, for Mary and Joseph, for you and me, for the salvation of the whole world.

⁴ Joel Green, *Luke*, 151.

⁵ Joel Green, *Luke*, 150.

This is the hope to which we cling, that Jesus came to you and to me not when we finally deserved it, but while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). You and I could never do enough to earn salvation. We could *never* earn it, so Jesus came. Since you and I do not need to earn our salvation, our lives are then freed to live for others. Our lives are for our neighbors.

During the totalitarian regime of Josef Stalin, doctor Boris Kornfeld was seized and sent away to a gulag, a forced-labor camp. For years, his captors tried to “re-educate” Boris, but he would not be re-educated. He kept to himself and trusted no one.

Unexpectedly, he began to trust in God. “His heart was flooded with hope.” And “he began to serve others. He even used his surgical skills to save the life of one of the hated guards. That act of compassion, he knew, would bring trouble.” He was threatened for helping the guard, and it was at this point “he realized he was no longer afraid.

“Later that day he performed life-saving stomach surgery on a young man with a sad face. He stayed up all night, sitting beside his patient, who was hovering between life and death. Suddenly he felt led to break his silence. He talked for hours to the young man about the joy of meeting this God of mercy and grace. He described how God’s love had driven the fear from his heart, and how he had even felt buoyed by meaning in the midst of the gulag’s misery.

“The young patient, gripping the doctor’s hand, listened intently as he drifted in and out of consciousness. Sometime around dawn, Boris Kornfeld was murdered by the prisoner who had threatened him. He had shared his spiritual convictions

just once. But his audience of one, the sad-faced prisoner, lived on. His name was Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Seized by the words he had heard from his doctor, Solzhenitsyn...abandoned his loyalty to Marxism. Kornfeld's faith had become his own." Solzhenitsyn won the "1970 Nobel Prize for Literature and became one of the most heralded voices for freedom in the 20th century."⁶

Dear friends, God will speak to you through unexpected people, perhaps even those who interrupt your plans. May you be empowered by God's Spirit to speak boldly and to share God's mercy and grace to all you meet. Go in peace. Amen.

⁶ Glenn McDonald, *Morning Reflection*, May 16, 2016.