

“My Eyes Have Seen Salvation”

Luke 2:22-40

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On the surface the story depicts an ordinary day in the life of ordinary people. Mary and Joseph bring their first-born son to the temple for the required circumcision and redeeming sacrifice. Anna has seen perhaps thousands of couples come and do the same, having made the Temple her home. Simeon has seen many too. Both elders have been waiting a lifetime for the promised Messiah and even if the day began in an ordinary way, it turned extraordinary for both as each was able to see in the newborn child, the fulfillment of God's promises.

Certainly, Simeon and Anna were both attuned to the work of the Holy Spirit. It's the Spirit who arranges this meeting, guiding Simeon to the temple that day to meet Jesus and his parents. Anna too has devoted her life to worship and to being attentive to God. Both receive a gift this day in part because both have learned to pay attention to God and what God is doing in the world.

It's a skill we can all cultivate. Many of the Vacation Bible School curriculum that I've worked with ask participants to keep an eye out for God sightings and encourage groups to begin each session by talking with the children about where they've seen God in the past day. Often at the beginning of each week they report back that they've seen God in the sunrise or the sunset or in their parents or their teachers, the kind of not incorrect but pat answers you might expect from children. Toward the end of the week though, more observant children begin to name specific actions they see others undertake or specific moments of reflection during which God is more particularly revealed to them.

I knew an older woman who went through life seeing God in just about every situation, somehow, some way. Every time she came to Sunday school, she had another story of something that happened that week that she attributed to God. I have mixed feelings about this. In part because she liked to shop and therefore many of her experiences had to do with the material. She needed a new washer and the one she wanted went on sale just as her old one died. She was out shopping, and she always brought all of her extra coupons and if she saw someone eyeing a product for which she had a coupon she gave it them. God's hand was in it all. I was a little

suspicious. Sadly, she developed a form of Leukemia which prematurely ended her life, but to her credit, even that didn't dampen her ability to see God in every encounter she had, many of them now with medical personnel. If one has to choose between seeing God everywhere and seeing God nowhere, I believe that her life was the richer for seeing God everywhere. She believed in the fulfillment of the promise of God's presence in her life and she wasn't disappointed. Simeon and Anna believed that each of them would see God's promise fulfilled and they were not disappointed.

Even Mary and Joseph, as surprised as they are by this encounter, are blessed by it. I can only imagine that they arrived at the temple that morning resolutely faithful and ready to carry out the required sacrifice but also emotionally and physically exhausted. Think of all they've been through in the past year of their lives, not to mention that they are new parents of a days-old infant who, no matter how special, still has the needs of an infant. Perhaps they too needed a reminder of God's activity in their lives and in the life of their son. Watching Simeon sweep Jesus into his arms and break into a song of delight was a surprising but strong reminder for them too of all God promised in the child. They'll return home at the end, back to *their* ordinary lives, but living with a new expectancy and confidence in the fulfillment of God's purposes.

And if you're recovering from the emotional and physical toll that celebrations of Christmas can often take on us these days, maybe you need this reminder too, to look on the world with expectancy and confidence in the fulfillment of God's promises to you and to the world. This text invites us to do that.

Even as we accept the comfort of that, we can't read this justly without thinking about Mary and Joseph a little bit more. While we need to imagine something about their emotional state, we don't need to imagine *anything* about their financial status. When they get to the temple, they offer two turtledoves which is the offering allowed for those who cannot afford a lamb. They are counted among the poor of their time. But it is through this impoverished couple that God chooses to work. It's in a child born to poor parents that God instills great promise, the hope of all people. Even as the text invites us to be on the lookout for signs of God's promise and confident that they're right there before us, it invites us to look for that promise in places and people we might not expect to see it. The poor hold just as much promise but often lack the resources to realize that promise. In her commentary on this text, Shelly Copeland asks this question, "If Jesus were born today, to teen parents in American urban poverty, would he be better off now than he was 2,000 years ago?"ⁱ I ask, "would those of us who live with privilege have been able to see the promise in him?" Copeland continues, "As people of faith in a privileged nation, we have an obligation to care for poor families in tangible ways, so they can raise their children with limited burdens. We miss out, as a community, when we don't acknowledge that all children in our midst are a gift to the world."

In our mission statement we say that part of our proclamation of the good news is to welcome friend and stranger alike...regardless of worldly condition of any kind. A question we might ask

ourselves is, “do we welcome people because of the promise we see in them or because we believe it’s our duty to do so?” I’ve never met anyone who likes to be seen as a recipient of charity or fulfilled duty but there are plenty of people who might blossom if someone could simply see and nurture the promise within. I’m sure we all fall on that continuum somewhere and depending on the day, it’s sometimes easier and sometimes harder to see the promise in all people, but this text begs us to have eyes that see the promise of God, the Christ in each person, regardless of their worldly circumstances, and to treat them accordingly.

“Simeon and Anna see in the birth of this child the beginning of a new order that will shake the foundations of the powers that be.” May we too be willing participants in the great reversal that began with the Christ child and will be completed with the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom. Amen.

¹ Copeland, Shelly D.B. “Homiletical Perspective on Luke 2:22-40.” *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 1*, edited by David L. Bartlett and Babara Brown Taylor, West Minster John Knox Press, 2008, 165-169.