

27 December 2020

Luke 2.22-40

How are you this soon after Christmas?

What is new, what has changed?

I count my blessings and give thanks. I am thankful my voice is getting stronger. I rest. I wait for God to speak in my life. Annie sleeps by my feet. The air is cool and temperature rising. I wonder about the COVID restrictions and how they might change, and whether to travel to Canberra, and whether I'll be able to get back without quarantining, and whether I'll get to Tassie.. such uncertainty, which only waiting can answer.

Frederick Buechner writes of this gospel passage:

Jesus was still in nappies when his parents brought him to the Temple in Jerusalem "to present him to the Lord" (Luke 2:22), as the custom was, and offer a sacrifice, and that's when old Simeon spotted him. Years before, he'd been told he wouldn't die till he'd seen the Messiah with his own two eyes, and time was running out. When the moment finally came, one look through his cataract lenses was all it took. He asked if it would be all right to hold the baby in his arms, and they told him to go ahead but be careful not to drop him. "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," he said (Luke 2:29), the baby playing with the fringes of his beard. The parents were pleased as punch, and so he blessed them too for good measure. Then something about the mother stopped him, and his expression changed. What he saw in her face was a long way off, but it was there so plainly he couldn't pretend. "A sword will pierce through your soul," he said (Luke 2:35). He would rather have bitten off his tongue than said it, but in that holy place he felt he had no choice. Then he handed her back the baby and departed in something less than the perfect peace he'd dreamed of all the long years of his waiting.¹

David Lose ponders:

According to Luke, it's now forty days after Jesus 'birth. After eight days, Jesus had been circumcised and named in accordance with Jewish law. Now, thirty-two days later, his parents are again performing their duty as faithful Jews by returning to the Temple, this time in order to offer a sacrifice and to consecrate their child to the Lord.

They must have been in a reverent, even solemn mood that day, the way many young parents in our congregations are when their first child is to be baptized. And so for this very reason they were perhaps startled, even frightened, when Simeon, old beyond years and beaming with ecstatic revelation, comes up to them to touch the child and then begins to sing.

Note, however, that he's not singing of angels and mangers but rather that he sings of letting go, of departing, of – truth be told – dying. Why does Simeon offer this oddest of Christmas carols to the holy family? Because in the infant Jesus he has seen a sign and token that the Lord has kept the promises made to the Israelites of old and, trusting God's promises, is able to accept his own death with courage.

Anna sings next. But hers are not songs of death but of praise and thanksgiving. She, too, receives the Christ child as a sign that God keeps God's promises and all she can do is respond with thanksgiving.²

¹ Luke 2:22-35

-Originally published in [Peculiar Treasures](#) and later in [Beyond Words](#)
<https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2018/11/2/simeon>

² <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/12/christmas-1-b-carols-of-thanksgiving-and-lament/>

Christ came not only for the joyful but also the despairing. God still comes amid the bleakness of our life and world, and it's helpful to remember that the holidays are for many of us a mixture of joy and regret, reunion and strife, hopes and disappointments, companionship and extreme loneliness. There will be some here who have lost loved ones this year, or struggle with depression, or can't find work, or despair over the bleak headlines of the news, and for all these reasons and more desperately crave to hear their laments among the praise. And they will take some measure of courage having had the chance to sing, and be reminded, that God comes to us precisely where we are broken.³

Anna and Simeon's waiting is fulfilled, yet their words will require patience on the part of Mary and Joseph... Jesus has a lot of growing up to do yet.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin writes

*Above all, trust the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability – and that it may take a very long time.*⁴

'Some things may take a very long time'

Do we try to rush God's work along in our lives? In our church? Or can we wait?

Anna and Simeon were very old. They waited a very long time to find what they were looking for.

('Guided by the Spirit', we hear, 'Simeon came into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God saying' ...

'At that moment, Anna came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.'))

Now, something special's going on here. These two elderly people Simeon and Anna – know something and proclaim it for all to hear – This little one is special. You'll see.

Looking on, are we caught up in the action? Or sceptical?

I'm inclined to listen to these two faithful devout people.

To give them the benefit of the doubt – why do I believe them?

They have nothing to lose, they've independently been waiting so long. Today something has moved them. We'll have to wait and see what becomes of these prophecies.

More waiting

with a different flavour,

watching this vulnerable child grow up.

Henri Nouwen:

'The greatest part of Jesus' life is a hidden life. It is a life lived under the authority of his parents during which he grew to maturity and increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God, and people. Although the gospels remain silent about this period of Jesus' life, this silence is very revealing. It reveals that the good news is first of all that God came to live among us, to be Emmanuel, God with us, and to share the ordinariness of our daily existence. Jesus wanted to be known as we are known. In God's eyes the most significant is often the most hidden'.⁵

³ <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/12/christmas-1-b-carols-of-thanksgiving-and-lament/>

⁴ Excerpt from 'Patient Trust' Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

⁵ p.22: "Jesus, a Gospel," Henri Nouwen

Butterfly story

Did you know that after a butterfly emerges from the chrysalis, before it can fly, it has to wait for its wings to dry and soak up the sun light if you tried to help it to unfold its wings, it will never fly. It has to wait until the time is right, then it will fly.

(Don't try to hurry the process of moving from the chrysalis to flying – you could cause irreparable damage.)

God help us to live slowly:

To move simply:

To look softly:

To allow emptiness:

To let the heart create for us.

Amen

- Michael Leunig

Susanna