

Written: Luke 2:29-35 “What You Hold in Your Hands and Heart?”

1st Sunday @ Christmas
Sunday, December 29th 2024

Text: Luke 2:29-35

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Exegetical Statement

Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the temple to fulfill the law regarding Mary's childbirth and the buying back of their firstborn son. They bring the offering of a poor family in keeping with the humble setting Jesus was born into. Simeon is there, directed by the Holy Spirit as God's witness to welcome the return of the presence of God into the temple and announce the consoling sacrifice has come for all people, the glory of Israel and the light of salvation to the Gentiles. He then predicts how this will happen as Jesus' life, death, and resurrection will serve as the fall for many into repentance or the ruin of unbelief on the Last Day. But for those who believe by faith He is the resurrection from spiritual death to life everlasting. He will be opposed by many, and the sword will pierce His side, as it will the souls of all who see His suffering and death for their sins. Anna is also present as God's second witness, fulfilling the demand in Jewish court of two witnesses. She gives witness to all who would hear that cloaked in this child is the one who would pay the ransom price for all awaiting the redemption of God's people. Mary and Joseph accomplish all that is necessary to fulfill the Law, and eventually head to Nazareth where Jesus grows in bodily strength, human wisdom, and favor of the Lord.

Focus Statement:

The infant Jesus is God's real presence cloaked in the body of a baby that returns to the temple after a 600-year absence. He comes not to be redeemed from service to the LORD but to serve as sacrifice that brings consolation, forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. He comes in His ministry to cause the fall of many from sinful pride to humble repentance by which they are lifted up to life with Him now and eternal life to come. He redeems us from slavery to sin, death, and the devil as His blood as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is painted on the doorposts of our heart, marking us as those redeemed by God into His family, the Church, where He continues to do His wonderful, sometimes mysterious work of blessing in us in body, soul, and spirit now and forever

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Do we often miss the significance of what/who it is we hold in our hands and take into our mouths when we partake of the Lord's Supper? Do we lack the thankfulness for the salvation this infant child came to provide for us and gives to us in the Sacraments?

What the hearer should do as a result:

Like Simeon and Anna, we are called to be witnesses to the redeemer of all people. We hold Him spiritually through baptism, spiritually and physically in the LORD's supper, and then are dismissed to share Him with those around us until the Lord decides our job on earth is done.

Subject Sentence: We hold the Redeemer cloaked in our hands and hearts

Introduction: Who Am I? And What Are You Holding?

Shalom! Peace be with you! It's good to be with you and make your acquaintance this morning. You may be wondering who I am. Before I get to introductions, I want to ask you a question, "What are you holding in your hands right now?" Hold it up so everyone can see. I'm hoping this won't be an embarrassment for any of you. Your Pastor said if I see anyone holding up something called a "Cell Phone", I should tell you to put it down.

If you do have anything in your hands, set it down next to you or on your lap. Now in the holder that is attached to the seat in front of you I believe you have a codex (I think you call it a book) that looks like this (Hold up a Pew Bible). Hold that up in your hand. C'mon, let me see all of you do it. Good. Your Pastor said there is some guy named Joel that has people who come to listen to him do this to start of his performance. Just so you know, I aint him, and my purpose for coming to you today is far greater than his, and you're holding up one of these books serves a differing purpose than his. You can go ahead and set them down for now, but not too far away out of your grasp.

My name is Simeon. You heard about me in your Gospel Reading just a few minutes ago. Let me ask you this, did you think I'd look older? Why? Is it because my cohort Anna, who was in the temple that day with me is 84 years old? Well, that was her, but not me. Is it because of the prophetic words I was inspired to speak, words that you're gonna sing a little later in this service, have me saying "O Lord, now let your servant depart in Peace..." Did you automatically assume those came from the lips of an old man that was just hanging on to life by a thread? Knowing that it was a younger man that said them, for I was even younger than I am now when this event you read about took place; does knowing that change how you receive these words? All this had to do with what I was holding in my hand. But more on that in a little bit. I'm getting ahead of myself.

Why I Was There in the Temple?

Another question you might want to ask is "What were you doing there in the temple that day?" Maybe some of you have the idea that I was there hanging out in the temple all day long every day of the week. That's not quite true. If that's what you think you're confusing me once again with my cohort, Anna. She's the one who spent all her time hanging out in the temple.

I was there in the temple, at just the right place and at just the right time to fulfill the will of the Lord for my life. I was there because of the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He moved me to get my rear end in gear and get to the temple. Now it's not like I didn't go on a regular basis, I did. Worshiping the Lord God of Israel was a very important part of my life. I took very seriously my call as one of His chosen people to worship and praise Him, and regularly be taught by His Holy Scriptures. And I also took seriously obeying His will. And that is why I was there at that particular time. I was moved by the Holy Spirit to go. It was a pretty serious prompting, a "Get up there right now" moment. I've found it's for the best to listen to the Spirit's prompting and directing voice.

The Spirit told me to be on the lookout for someone. Now in your day and age, if you were supposed to be on the lookout for someone what would you be holding in your hands? A picture? Your Pastor told me those "Cell Phone" things can be like having a color picture that is an exact resemblance of the person you're looking for. Needless to say, I didn't have anything like that.

The Holy Spirit told me that I was going to see the Lord's greatest gift for His people, the long-promised Messiah, the Anointed One of God, the One you call Christ the Lord. Being well taught in the Scriptures, both the Law and the Prophets, I knew what had been prophetically promised about this special One of God. He would be our Savior from those enemies that had oppressed us for so long. So, I was imagining a big strapping warrior, someone who resembled His ancestor King David, whose kingdom the teachers of the law said He would restore here in Jerusalem. The Spirit had told me He would be "**the consolation**" of Israel, the comforting sign and message for our nation, the promise that we had waited so long for the LORD to fulfill. And the Holy Spirit had promised me that I would see this Messiah, this Christ, before I passed on from this earth. So, I headed quickly to the temple, knowing today would be the day, and trusting the Spirit would point this Messiah out to me.

Why Were Mary and Joseph There?

While I was there a young couple came with their first-born son. I didn't think too much of them at first. They weren't the only ones bringing their first-born son to the temple. This was a regular thing for the parents of a first-born child. After 8 days the child would be circumcised. This was done at the home usually by the boy's father at which time he would officially pronounce the boy's name. Then 32 days later, according to the Law given to Moses, the parents were to come to the temple with an offering given to the priest for the purification of the mother after childbirth. That is because whenever there is a discharge of blood purification must be made according to the Laws of Moses.

But parents also had to bring their firstborn son to the temple to present him to the priest and pay the 7-shekel price to redeem him, buy him back. That goes back to the story of the LORD God saving us out of slavery in Egypt. You know that story, don't you? I'm told that many of you are not as dedicated to reading the Scriptures as we were in our day, so I'll share it with you.

A long time ago my people were held as slaves in Egypt. But the LORD promised to deliver us from slavery. And He did so through 10 mighty miraculous acts, the final one being the death of all the first-born males of the Egyptians as well as their livestock. All the firstborn Jewish boys would've died too except the LORD paid the price to redeem them as His own. He claimed them for Himself, and the mark of ownership was the blood of the sacrificial lamb marked on the door posts of their houses. When the angel of death saw the blood on the doorposts, he passed over that house and left those first-born sons alive, because they belonged to God, paid for by the blood of the lamb.

Throughout our history, up until that day, parents were bringing their first-born to the temple to redeem them, buy them back from the Lord, who ceremonially claimed them. All this was done as a reminder of God's great saving act on our behalf. Parents would pay the 7-shekel offering and ceremonially buy their first-born back from the Lord. Mary and Joseph came to the temple to accomplish both the purification and the buying back of the first-born in keeping with the Law of Moses. One among many doing so. Except that this first-born child, as it turns out, was not like the rest.

What I Held in My Hand

The Spirit pointed out to me this couple, and this child, and told me that He is the one! I couldn't believe it. Our Messiah Savior had come, and the Lord had sent Him as the infant child of two rather poor parents. I mean they didn't even have money to buy the proper animal for purification. Instead of a lamb they had two turtle doves, the sacrificial animals for those without much money. Where was the big strapping soldier Messiah who would vanquish our enemies, the Romans? But there is no arguing with the Holy Spirit. He knows.

So, I approached them and told them who I was, and that the Holy Spirit had directed me to them. I asked if I could take the child in my arms and wonder of wonders, they agreed. This was a "God-moment", orchestrated by the Lord Himself. As soon as I took that child into my arms, I knew I was holding no ordinary child.

I was holding the consoling comforting promise of God for all people. I was holding the human child that was also the very God who created all things. The God for whom nothing is impossible. The God who, through this child, intimately united Himself to save us, to redeem us from a kind of slavery that is far greater than what our ancestors suffered in Egypt. He didn't come to save us from Rome. He came to save us from the enemies that would keep us apart from Him now and forever: sin, death, and the devil.

And how would this child save us from so great an enemy? Not by wielding a soldier's sword. But by being run through with a sword Himself. This is the child that was born to suffer and die on the cross to pay the price for your redemption, your salvation. And the empty tomb is your proof the price has been paid and you are now a precious child of the heavenly Father

Inspired by the Holy Spirit I told His mother Mary, "***This child is appointed for the fall and rising of many***". By His work and teaching many would be brought to the falling that is humble repentance, recognizing their utter depravity to save themselves and turning to this Savior as the only answer. And when He becomes your answer for sin, death, and the devil, He raises you up to life now and eternal life to come. But the Spirit revealed He would be a sign that would be opposed by many, opposed all the way to death on the cross. And those who continue to oppose Him throughout their life will suffer the eternal consequences. But those whose hearts are pierced by the words of Law from His lips, they shall be raised up to a life of faith with Him now and eternal life forever.

What You Hold in Your Hand

When I was holding that baby in my hand, I was holding the very Creator of the Universe, cloaked in the body of a real baby boy.

So now hold that book back up. What are you holding in your hand? More than just a book. You are holding the very words of that Creator God that are His gift to you to reveal who He is to you and what He came to do. They are His means to cause you to fall down in Confession of your sins and rise up in repentant faith, knowing for certain you are forgiven.

When you were baptized, what was the Pastor holding in his hand as he splashed water on your forehead three times? What was running across your forehead and into your heart and mind? In that water was the very Creator of the Universe who comes to begin that work of moving you to fall from your sinful selfish life and ambitions and instead rise to a life of faith in this child who grew to become the Savior of all.

Your Pastor left this in the back for me. It's His Communion Kit when He goes and visits people. When you gather around this rail and take the wafer of bread in your hand, what are you holding? When you take and drink the wine what are you taking into yourself? That very consolation of God's people that I held. Perhaps you might be envious of me because I was blessed enough to hold the Christ child in my hands. But you, you receive something greater. That consoling comforter is not only in your hands but is taken into your very being and becomes a part of you, confirming in your heart and mind that you are indeed redeemed by His blood, forgiven, and restored to life with Him now and eternal life to come.

Conclusion:

My time is up. But before I leave, I want you to think about the words I got to speak as I was holding that baby, words inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself. These are the words you will get to sing after you have held the bread and the wine that is the body and blood of this dear child, grown to be a man, grown to be our Savior. **Luke 2:29-32** ²⁹ **“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;”**³⁰ **for my eyes have seen your salvation** ³¹ **that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,** ³² **a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”** I wasn’t saying I was old and ready to die. I was saying that in seeing and believing that this child is my Lord and Savior, I am ready at any time to go and be with Him, no matter what age I am. Because I know eternal life waits for me and for all who believe. May that be your confession too. Shalom!