

Catching Glimpses

Luke 2:25-35

Sermon by Billy Funk

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Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.^[a]²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon^[b] came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸ Simeon^[c] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

*²⁹ "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word,*

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which 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 the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too."

Introduction

I was told for this sermon to choose a scripture that *means* something to me. Perhaps one of the scriptures that I listed my MLI, the form you fill if your someone who is considering ministry in the Mennonite church and there you list some of your favorite scripture passages.

And so, my immediate thought was "man I got to go look at my MLI again, because I have no idea what I put down." And my second was a

strong feeling dread. Because it is one thing to be given a text or a series of text to choose from or told the theme like “Hey we are trying to shed new light on difficult and problematic texts so what about for this sermon you work 2 Kings Chapter 2 and so could you tell the story from the She bear’s perspective.”

That scenario, to be given a text, is more appealing for me, because there is always an out. “I did the best I could with what was given to me”, “man that Jesus is tricky, what a parable, maybe we are supposed to hide the coins?” Or “Paul, what you gonna do? Its Paul, I mean good stuff, but Paul you know.” I always have an out, even if it’s only in my own head, I have an out.

But choosing a text means something to me, Means something to me. Choosing a text that I maybe love, is scary. It is vulnerable. There is more at stake.

That is all a long way of saying that I love this story about Simeon. I mean we named our kid Simeon in part because of this text. And I first really heard it about a year and a half ago. Before I did not remember it. I just glazed over it. And this makes sense. Form a quick read of this story it seems a little too perfect:

There is this character Simeon and who apparently is Good guy. And the Spirt, the Holy Spirit at that, rests on him and tells him great news that he will see the Lord’s messiah in his lifetime, and is led to the temple, and he sees the baby and has a nice speech yes, yes, good, good. And then there is an ominous part of the text about how he will cause division and that’s uncomfortable and so I move quickly past that

one...Keep moving, keep moving. On to the next story. And I totally missed it.

A lot of things are rather uninteresting is I don't look at them, if I assume, I already know what there is to know and if I play the ending at the beginning of a story. A lot of things are missed.

But When I look at Simeon, when I pay attention to him as a character not a caricature, as a human. For me, this text comes alive. So, let's look at Simeon.

Simeon is old. He is an old man. This is not said in the text explicitly but it's implied. It's Implied that he is holding on to life longing for something that is just out of reach, a hope he has lived his whole life for, by all accounts a faithful life, and intentional life, rooted in his Jewish tradition.

He is in Jerusalem and he would have seen a lot. He would have grown up in a Jerusalem after it had been captured and the temple desecrated by the Roman General Pompey the Great in 63 BCE and would have known Jerusalem under the control of the Herodian family given its authority by the Roman Senate. Jerusalem would have grown during his life in wealth and influences under Herod the great with a spruced-up temple to boot. But he would have experienced and Israel that was not its own. Experienced various levels of Roman occupation and Roman presence throughout his life. He would have likely seen crucifixions that would had communicated Roman power. He probably had many conversations about politics in his time, that seems eternal, discussions, heated debates or simple side comments with various views of how the People in Jerusalem should relate to local and foreign authorities. Some

escapist, some conciliatory, some antagonistic. And most certain, he would have experienced joys, pain and struggle that come with living life. And the Holy Spirit rested on him and tells him that he will see the Lord's Messiah. He must have been overjoyed, ecstatic, moving to that temple, dancing! People watching were probably saying "what's going on with Simeon", "something has gotten in to that old man", "really? are you surprised Judith, I mean its Simeon!"

He is told he will see the Lord's Messiah, but what was he expecting? What was that image in his mind? What did he think he was going to see? Was he expecting to see a grown warrior reminiscent of king David himself, the anointed one, triumphant, destined for victory? Was he expecting to see a great priest teaching many, or maybe the prophet Elijah himself, riding on a cloud?

The text does not actually say that he knows who he is looking for.

And so I imagine Simeon entering the temple, looking around at all the busyness, the people, some he knows, (waves) some he doesn't, he sees that one guy who always annoys him, "hmmph get out of here," he sees the prophet Anna teaching a group of people (real recognize real), He sees money changers and animals, a couple, oh they have a baby, looks back this way and then it hits him.

It's the baby...it's a baby? And Simeon realizes at that moment that he will die long before this baby grows up and does anything messianic. Was this a cruel joke? Was the Holy Spirit messing with him? "It's a Baby?" "I don't even get to see him do anything?!" ...It's a baby.

And he goes over to the couple, picks up the child, and he looks upon his face. This little baby's face, and he gets it. Whatever he was expecting whatever image he had in his head, it doesn't matter anymore. All that matters is this little, fragile, dependent, baby. This is the lord's messiah. And he says:

“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Simeon sees in this little baby's face not his salvation but God's Salvation, a salvation for all the nations, but one that still includes his people. A salvation that is bigger than him but he is still a part of it, and in this moment he sees just a piece, catches just a glimpse, but it's enough. He can go in peace.

I love this moment because it shows what kind of salvation this God is all about: a salvation not of conquering but of communion, not of power over but of power with, not of a king riding on a shiny horse but a little baby.

And Most of all I love this moment because it is a profoundly human one. Simeon experiences this joy, but the sorrow that comes with the end of life doesn't goes away, it is still there.

One experience that I have had that has helped me connect with this scripture is my experience with improv comedy.

After college Alita and I got married and we moved to Chicago. We went for her grad school and we also went so I could do Improv comedy, in the improv capital of the world. I had heard of Tina Fey and that was where she had gone. My theater prof has suggested it, so I went. I don't know what I was expecting exactly but I and many of the folks I met along the way, were concerned with success. To get good enough at improv and sketch comedy to make teams, to perform regularly at theaters, to maybe even getting an agent, so you could try for bigger theaters and maybe even get so good we could get cast in shows in LA or New York and maybe even be the next Tina Fey, who knows.

And so, I got involved, took classes at multiple theaters, got on teams, performed a lot. And for all I had expected or thought I needed it was the moments on stage where there was a synergy with my teammates who had become close friends and we were vibing in such a way that the audience was responding to us. The funny scenes were actually funny the serious scenes were authentic. It was these moments of deep connection that I realized were all I actually needed from this; these moments were enough.

This is how I have experienced of God, the Holy Spirit, and God's salvation. As Glimpses. Not complete, not without struggle, awkwardness, pain or the complexity of life, but in the midst of all of it. And this is how I have come to experience church. Living ordinary lives together, flaws and all.

And so, at this moment I'm excited for the possibilities at Berkey, if I am lucky enough to be hired here. I am excited for what the future holds. But there will be challenges that I can't anticipate, meetings that drain, conflict that arises, times when I feel not up to the task. But it is my

hope and suspicion that in the midst of this, in the midst of doing the work that is church, that there will be profound moments of connection and joy. Moments where we experience a salvation that is bigger than any of us and yet includes us. Holy moments. And one of the main reasons I want to be here, at Berkeley, why I feel called to be here, is because from what I have heard about Berkeley and what I have already experienced in conversation with people this weekend is that it is a community, that like Simeon looking at the child Jesus, can recognize holy moments. It is a community that can register the glimpses of profound connection with God and each other in the midst of life together. Amen.