

Peace in a Small Package

Christmas 1; Year B

Luke 2:22-40

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

My brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. A tantamount event happened in my household this week. For years, and I mean years, my wife has wanted to eat a honeycomb. I have always wanted to try one; I see it in movies and online. It looks so good, and I want to try one.

And what do you know! Walking around ALDI and on a corner shelf was "Acacia Honey, with comb." She sat down, put some on her favorite plate, cut a piece, and bit into it... "Oh, well, I definitely hyped myself up too much for that."

Most likely, you've had an experience similar to this one at a point, probably multiple points in your lifetime. You are waiting; you are so excited for something, someone, but when it comes, it's not really all that you made it out to be. It's interesting that frequently waiting in anticipation for something, the longer we wait, the higher our expectations go, and the likelier it is that our expectations will not be met.

If there was ever an opportunity for sky-high expectations and the crushing disappointment of reality, it might have come in the life of one man that we know as Simeon. Simeon is one of those characters in the Bible that we would love to have more information about, but as God does, he gives us the information that we need. And what we need to know is this: The Holy Spirit had spoken to Simeon at some point in his life, and the Spirit had a singular message: **It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.** Simeon would not taste death until he had seen, with his own eyes, the promised Messiah in the flesh.

And what a wait it must have been! Knowing this is your destiny and just waiting for the day. And day after day, he went about his business. "Is this the day?" Week after week, he continued, waiting, hoping, looking for Messiah himself. And we don't know how long he

had to wait. It's very possible that he was a very old man when one day: **"Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."**

Today is the day! It's finally here; the Christ is here! As Simeon enters the courts, what does he see? A 40-day-old baby. Hmm. If there was a moment that Simeon could have felt left down, this could definitely be it. After all, a righteous and devout man like Simeon would have been well aware of what the presence of the Lord meant in the history of Israel. God's presence that led the nation as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. His glory that visibly dwelt over the ark. God's glory that as the ark was carried to the temple, the cloud filled so thick that even the priests could not do their duties.

And now, this? Simeon holds a baby boy, not unlike many he has seen before. He is accompanied by two parents of such poor and humble nature that they can't even afford a lamb but must use birds to redeem their firstborn. No cloud, no fire. No procession. No one really even took notice. Not even someone who could speak. Just a baby in his arms.

But this is not what Simeon sees. No, Simeon is Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. While the world might look at all that is not met in the Messiah, Simeon knows what is. And he responds with words that have echoed down through the ages: **"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."**

Simeon sees this child for what he really is. In this child is God and man. Here is the one who is subjected to the law to fulfill the law on my behalf. Here is the one promised from of old to redeem his people Israel. Here is the one who will bring life, light, and salvation to the Gentiles. Here is the one who brings forgiveness of sins, remission of guilt, the abolition of shame, and eternal life to all. Here he is, the one who is salvation even if the world takes no note or passes him by. Here is what I've been waiting for, and it does not disappoint.

Many times, I think you and I can get caught up with the crowd as Simeon sings in the background. We know God's promises to us. To care for us, to protect us, to provide for us, to forgive us, but so often we just wish, we expect that God would give us something a little bigger in these. A little showmanship, a demonstration of power, something with some oomph that I and, yes, the rest of the world would take notice of.

And what does God provide? Some words written on a page, bound in a book that can be found on a Barnes and Noble bookshelf. Some water from a tap placed in a bowl and sprinkled on a child's head. A tiny bite of bread and a little sip of wine. Seems a little anticlimactic, doesn't it?

But I think you know full well that God doesn't work in order to reveal himself to the world in ways that would impress them. God comes to grant peace in ways that confound the world. And you, just like Simeon, sing along in praise when God reveals himself to you.

Because you know what God has given in those seemingly small packages, in those words written on paper, are life itself. It is in those words that we hear of God's plan for the world, where we hear of his protection and promises of his people, where we hear of our Savior Jesus, who acted in time on our behalf. The story of his birth, his perfect death, his resurrection. It is there in those words, so often ignored and passed over, that the Holy Spirit works through, creating faith, strengthening that faith, and keeping us firm until the promise of everlasting life. In those words are, peace.

In that water, from a bottle, from a tap, in a church, or in a hospital, there is something so much more marvelous. In that water connected to the Word, there God himself works. There, in that moment, a person is buried with Christ. There, the Spirit penetrates a sin-darkened soul and gives them a second birth as a child of God guarded and protected. As many ignore and pass by, their sins are washed away.

In a meal, in a single sip, a small bite, oh, what a miracle. While the world scoffs, in with and under that bread and that wine, the very body and blood of our Lord. And in something so small, Christ unites us with those around us confessing the same faith and joins us with himself. There, Christ gives the forgiveness of all our sins and the strength needed to fight sin and guards us in the faith until life everlasting.

Simeon, after waiting for so long, held something that to the world would be considered a letdown. But he is not. On that day, the peace the angelic host promised for all on whom his favor rests came to Simeon. There, in a 40-day-old baby, Simeon fixed his eyes on the one who brought the consolation of Israel. And with that sight, he was ready to die in peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, the world will continue to dash your expectations to pieces just like it did for my wife, expecting something exceptional from a honeycomb. Your God never does. In those small packages of Word and Sacrament, God exceeds and will always exceed what is expected. And you, like Simeon, having encountered God's glory given to you in these, will depart in peace whenever that time comes. **For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.**