

Luke 2.33-40
1st Sunday after Christmas
30 January 2018
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Gloria in excelsis deo +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

“Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign to be spoken against (and a sword will pierce your own soul also), so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Oremus: haec, pater sancte, verba tua sunt, etc.

It's a scary thing, this business about Jesus.

At least that's what Simeon says.

It's the 40th day after the birth of Jesus. And Mary and Joseph have gone up to the temple for a twofold purpose.

First, for Mary's purification as a new mother according to the Law of Moses.

And second—and again, in keeping with the Law of Moses—to redeem Him, their first-born Son, who is Himself the Ransom of Jerusalem and the Ransomer of all who are held in bondage to their sin.

And holding the baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon looks at this harmless, squirming little child on the 40th day after His birth—His eyes can probably barely focus by now—and speaks over Him words of hope and words of foreboding: He is appointed for the fall and the rising of many in Israel. Think of that: this Child—and the fate of everyone hangs in the balance.

And that—that's what makes this thing about Jesus scary.

You know that. And so do I. We feel it in our chest. We feel it on our lips. When it's time to confess Jesus as the Ransomer of the world, that's when the difficulties set in.

When our next door neighbors need to hear about Jesus as their rescuer from sin and death, we clam up (unless they're already Christians).

When our grown children, who've long since fallen from the Church and Faith, need to hear about Jesus, we make out the bonds of blood to be thicker than the Word of Christ is powerful. And we bite our tongues.

When it's time to proclaim Christ in our own household to the family gathered around dinner—it seems so awkward! We've never *done* devotions!—we say, “Alright! Let's everyone help clear!”

And when it comes to making sure our children and spouse are in the house of the Lord hearing His holy Word and receiving His blessed Sacrament, how easy it is ... not to appear quite *that pious*. Not to want to be the one who's *always* gotta say, “No. we're gonna go to church today.”

For Christ is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel. There's no neutrality when it comes to Christ. If you're not for Him, you're against Him. And if you're not against Him, you must be for Him. And

the risk—what makes it so scary to proclaim Jesus as the Savior of the world to child, friend, relative, coworker—is that the outcome of that conversation, why, it’s totally out of your hands. All the Lord has asked you to do is proclaim Him. And the rest of it lies in His hands, that two-fold result—for their fall or for their rising. Wherever Christ is proclaimed—by you, by your fellow congregants, by your pastors—the Ransomer of the world must become either a sign spoken against, or a sign spoken *for*. And just as Mary must have watched in sorrow how people lined up for and against her dear Son, so is your grief in seeing your own dear Jesus become this bone of contention, with all the personal risks that come with that.

So I suppose the big question on your mind is “Why?” “Why must it be like that? Christ has become to me what He always promised Himself to be. My Life. My Salvation. My Redeemer. My Way and my Truth.”

It’s really quite simple. It’s because wherever the name of Jesus is rightly proclaimed—as the One who redeems and ransoms the world from its sin—the thought of every heart is exposed.

I’m willing for you to see anything about me. You can look at my face. You can look at my clothes. You can look at what I do.

But for the love of God—my thoughts? Stay away from my thoughts. And this bit about Jesus and sin, well, that’s just a bit too much. How dare you call me a sinner? How dare anyone, even Jesus, call unholy what I call noble? How dare it be said that what goes for equity and justice in the world—whatever the bandwagon du jour happens to be—that even *that* is in need of redemption? I’m doing fine on my own, thank you very much. And I’m certainly not such a bad person that I need the Son of God to die for me.

You see, fellow-redeemed, whenever Jesus is rightly proclaimed—as the Ransomer of the world from sin—it comes against whoever hears it as a great offense. Because it calls into question everything you think about yourself. It calls your greatest good deeds sins, your righteousness filthy rags, and your best efforts a total failure.

Worse, it says that because of all of that, you can’t do it on your own. If you are to be saved from your sins, Another must step into your place. If you are to have heaven, Another must open it to you. If you are to be counted truly righteous and holy, it must be by the righteousness and holiness of Another—of Jesus Christ, the one appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.

And I don’t want to hear about *that*.

And yet...and yet...I must! For if I don’t have Jesus, I have nothing. If I don’t have Jesus, I have no heaven, only hell. If I don’t have Jesus, I have no holiness, only my own sin. If I don’t have Jesus, I have no salvation, only a deathward drift from futile birth.

But if I *am* to have Jesus, I can encounter Him in no other way than through His holy Word and blessed Sacrament. Think about that! To have Jesus I must have His Word and Sacrament.

Mary and Joseph handled the very Son of God in their squirming little Child and adopted Child. But what Mary pondered in her heart at His birth was not the sight of her Baby lying in a manger. It was words—the words of the shepherds who announced to her what the angels had said: “To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!” And what Joseph and Mary marveled at that day in the temple wasn’t the splendor of the place, or the cuteness of their little Jesus doing what every little 40-day-old Jewish boy had to do, or the magnificence of the choirs of Levites and all the priests scurrying about in their garb. No. What they marveled at were the words of Simeon: O Lord, my eyes have seen Your *salvation*.” And what stirred old, widowed Anna wasn’t getting a wink from her priest Simeon. Or the cute little Baby in his arms—a baby like the one she never got to have. It was what she heard him say to Mary and Joseph as he held that Baby: “your salvation.”

You see, Simeon proclaimed the whole and essential truth about Christ. Jesus Christ is the Savior. And those who heard *that* had Christ more that way than they did by gazing upon Him, by holding Him in their arms, by nursing Him, by changing His diapers.

It’s pretty tough not to be touched by a bouncing Baby Boy.

But it’s easy to stand against the Word about Him. That this Baby Boy *is* what the Lord has done to save. That this Baby Boy will grow to manhood. And become a lightning rod in Israel. To the point that His opponents will seek His life and take it. And that through that death—the Holy One for sinners—the door and gate and portal of heaven is flung open to all believers.

And yet, it’s just that word that must be proclaimed. For Christ can be had in no other way. That’s what Simeon knew. And it’s what Anna knew. As soon *she* heard the word about Christ, look at what she did. She confessed. She “began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” For here was their Redeemer: *in His Word*.

You’ll see in your bulletin insert and in the Notes section of the bulletin that we’ve got big things planned to kick off Sound Words for 2019.

Every One His Witness is a workshop on sharing the Good News of Jesus. Note how that’s put: *Every One His Witness*. It’s not just your pastors that are witnesses to the Lord, though they have a special call and vocation to do so. It’s everyone. Everyone into whose heart the Spirit has been sent through the working of water and the Word. In other words: *everyone is you*.

We’ve ordered 50 copies of the material. But if we have to order 50 more after we see attendance on Wednesday night we’ll be glad to. Why? Because every one of you, whether you like it or not, is called to be His witness. If you can look at the Baby in Simeon’s arms and say, “For me,” then the Lord has given His Word to you. To use for yourself. And to proclaim to others.

...just like Simeon. Of course, he was a priest. That was his job. But also just like Anna. She wasn’t a priest or even a priest’s daughter—she was of the tribe of Asher. And she wasn’t even young. Probably well into her 100s if you do the math. Married at 15. Seven years with her husband till he died. 84 years as a widow. She was just someone who spoke the Word of Christ—an “every one” who was Christ’s witness. And she spoke it all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

To all who were awaiting the redemption. Fellow-redeemed: a great pall of sin and death has been cast upon the world since Adam's sin, and the entire world reels and groans and struggles under the weight of it. Helplessly trying to find redemption.

It's you. It's your children and extended family. It's your neighbor and co-worker. It's your classmates and coaches. Each in their own way longing to hear the Word of Christ. Perhaps unaware of what they're waiting for. But needing nevertheless to hear that in Jesus sin and death have been ended. Needing to know that they can be washed of their sin in the water of Holy Baptism. Needing to know that the same Lord Jesus held in Simeon's arms wants to put His body and blood on their lips to forgive their sins. Needing to know that in Christ they have a dear Father in heaven who looks on them with His favor, and a resurrection to everlasting life. The same stuff you have already.

Anna knew that. She knew what everyone needed and was waiting for. And so she just...did it. She spoke of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Out on a limb. Scary stuff. But that's what she'd been called to.

And the hard part? the falling and the rising? That she left to the Lord.

Amen.

pax domini, etc.

sdg
jsb