

Sermon Luke 2 22 40 1st Sunday after Christmas Series C

Sermon: First Sunday after Christmas

Text: Luke 2:25-38

Theme: O Lord, now You dismiss your servant in peace. (Why?)

Goal: That we can go home in peace every time we come to the Church, because we have seen Jesus, our Salvation, in his Word and in the Sacraments.

Dear friends in Christ,

Introduction: What have we seen this Christmas? Just some lights that decorate homes, streets and commercial buildings? - What have we seen this Christmas? Just some relatives and friends, whom we celebrated Christmas with? - What have we seen this Christmas? Just the gifts that we received? -What more have you seen this Christmas? ... What have we seen this Christmas that is worthy to thank God, as Simeon thanks God in our text?

I - Because he saw God's salvation.

Once I asked some people gathered for a Bible Study: How do you feel when you go home after the service? I received very different answers. One said: Sometimes I feel myself more guilty, because I know that I'm not doing all that God is expecting from me. Another said: I feel myself very comforted and light, because I received God's forgiveness. The other said: I feel myself very happy, because it was a good opportunity to meet my friends again...

How do you feel when you go home after the service? Have you ever reflected on this question?

For some people it is just an opportunity to meet friends and to carry out a duty. They don't understand why the church is there. – For others, oppressed by the law, their ears can hear only what God is expecting from us, and not what God is offering to us. It depends on with what kind of intention you come to the church. – But for others it is really an opportunity to bring all their sorrow and burdens to put them

down them under the cross, going back to their house relieved and in peace.

We need to learn from Simeon, the old man who took the baby Jesus in his arms at the temple and praised God. He was a faithful one. The Bible says about him, that “he was righteous and devout”, and that “he was waiting for the consolation of Israel”. What does it mean? It means that he was not looking at himself; he was not trying to please God to earn a good place in heaven. He was not self-confident in his righteousness. It means that he was looking forward and was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He knew the prophecy of Isaiah: “Comfort, comfort my people, says our God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her... that her sin has been paid for... Lift up your voice with a shout... and say to Judah, “Here is your God!” He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (Isaiah 40:1,2,9,11). Simeon was a faithful man and was waiting for the Messiah, the Comforter, and he was waiting for the Consolation of Israel! Therefore he went to the temple: to look for consolation, to seek comfort. He used to go to the temple; but that day he didn't go there by himself; the Holy Spirit moved him to go to the temple!

God gave us the Holy Spirit and the true faith when we were baptized. If we let the Holy Spirit guide us, he will lead us on the right path. But if we are rebels against God and his Holy Spirit, running away from God and following our own ways, what can we expect?

The Holy Spirit “leads me besides quiet waters; he guides me in path of righteousness for his name's sake, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” (Psalm 23). And, as Simeon was directed by the Holy Spirit to go to the temple and he saw there nothing more than Jesus, so the Holy Spirit moves us too to God's house to see Jesus! Nothing more is important when we come to the church, but to see Jesus!

And Jesus shows himself in His Word and in His Holy Sacrament, the very body and very blood of our Lord Jesus, given to us to comfort us, to give us forgiveness of sins and hope for the eternal life! Simeon recognized in the little Child brought to the temple by Joseph and Mary, yes, he recognized the Messiah, promised by God! And he praises God

for this opportunity he has! And now, he can depart in peace, not just from the temple, but from this life too. He was ready to be called by God to the heavenly house!

We sing or say the words of Simeon as a prayer after the Lord's Supper. This means that we believe that our eyes have seen Christ, our Savior as well as we receive the bread and the wine, the very body and very blood of our Lord Jesus, given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore we can depart in peace from the church back to our homes, and we can depart in peace from this life to the eternal life when God calls us one day – we don't know when...

II – Because He is the salvation of “all people” – even to the “gentiles”.

But that Good News is not only for Simeon, for the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, or just for us believers of today. Jesus is the Consolation and the Salvation “which God has prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”.

The Evangelist Luke, who wrote this text inspired by the Holy Spirit, was not from the people of Israel. He was a Gentile – he was from another people, from another religious background, from another race. But God showed His mercy upon him and called him to the Christian faith. And he is writing this Book to another Gentile, “the most excellent Theophilus”, maybe a high positioned political person at that time; but a new Christian too!

We were not from the original “God's people” either; we were not Jews (maybe some of us were, I don't know). But this is the Good News of Christmas that Simeon confirms now in his hymn of praise: Jesus came to be the Savior “of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles”. And God's grace in Jesus reaches every one of us, opening our eyes to see the Savior and to be comforted by him.

Simeon, after his song of praise, talked to Mary that “a sword will pierce your own soul too”, a prophecy about the great suffering that would happen when Jesus would be crucified – as our Savior, as an offering for our sins. These all were in the plans of God for our

salvation. What we cannot do by ourselves, Jesus did for us. When we believe in Him, when we see Him by faith as He reveals Himself in His Word and in the Sacraments – we are forgiven and we are in peace with God. We can say with Simeon: “Now, Lord, let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and to the glory of your people Israel.”

Conclusion: Today is the last Sunday of this year. Jesus showed Himself several times to us during this year; He is never far from us. If you feel that He is far from you, be sure that He is at the same place as He is every time: in His Word and in His Sacraments. Maybe you have moved far from Him and it's difficult to hear His voice and to receive the comfort He wants to give you. Come nearer; let you be guided by the Holy Spirit to the temple too in the New Year; do not resist, closing your ears and closing your eyes. God is setting a New Year in front of us, a new year of opportunities. What do you expect in this New Year? I don't know. Let us be guided by the Holy Spirit. He will lead us every day to Jesus, to comfort us, to strengthen us in the true faith and in the true hope.

“God enables us to depart from one year into the next with the peaceful assurance of our salvation, confident that nothing can separate us from His love for us in Christ Jesus, our Lord. God promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13.5). (Portals of Prayers, Oct/Dec 2006). Therefore, “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace.”
Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 30 December 2012 (Adapted)