

Sermon Response Guide - December 17, 2023
Luke 2:25-35 “Simeon’s Song”
Pastor Phil Rushton

Sermon Overview:

The advent season we have been meditating on the four songs that show up in Luke 1 and 2. Our final song from Simeon is known as the *nunc dimittis*, which is the latin verb for “now dismiss.” Simeon sings, “Now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

After years of praying, waiting, enduring political turmoil, and a spiritual decline among his people, Simeon is finally at peace. He has discovered the source of redemption and consolation for his people.

I wonder what would enable us to say the same thing? What would enable us to say “I can be released now?” “I am at peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation?” While the season of Christmas celebrates the promise of peace on earth, our daily lives are often over-run with anxiety, conflict, and fear.

We need peace in our lives and in our world. We live in a cultural moment that gives us ample reason to be anxious. Like these first worshippers in the gospel of Luke, we live in a time of violence, political turmoil and division, and economic uncertainty. It is natural for us to look for an antidote to this anxiety, to find some semblance of peace. Yet, often the things we turn to for peace are temporary at best, and do not resolve the core issues that cause us insecurity as human beings.

Simeon, discovers peace in an unexpected place. Salvation has not come through a powerful leader arriving in Jerusalem on a stallion with an army. Salvation is not found in a wealthy prince or king. No, Simeon sees salvation in the presence of humble child born to parents who live in poverty.

Simeon sees ahead to the fate of this child. Jesus will usher in a peace forged not through violence and worldly power, not through avoidance and escapism, but through a sacrificial death on a cross. That is why this song of hope is tinged with an ominous warning that it will involve heartbreak and pain. Simeon says to Mary, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Already, at the outset of the story of Jesus, we see foreshadowing of his sacrificial death. In John Donne’s sermon on this passage he writes, “Christ was born a Martyr. He found a Golgotha, where he was crucified, even in Bethlehem, where he was born; for to his tenderness then the straws were almost as sharp as the thorns after, and the manger as uneasy at first as the cross at last. His birth and his death were but one continual act.”

Jesus, came to bring peace, but it was unexpectedly achieved through his death on the cross. As Paul writes, in Colossians 1:19-20 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

In Christ, we find a more foundational peace. A peace that gets at the core of our human need. A peace that passes understanding that guards our heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

On the cross, Jesus made peace between us and God. We no longer need to prove that we are enough. We no longer need to try and compensate for past failures and past mistakes. In Christ, we are loved as we are. God makes peace with us not counting our sins against us.

On the cross, Jesus makes peace between us and one another. When we discover that we are all equally loved by God, the playing field is leveled. The walls of hostility between us and others are broken down, when we view our enemies as beloved children of God.

On the cross, Jesus enables us to be at peace with death itself. We can face the reality of our mortality with the hope that nothing will separate us from Christ, not even death.

The peace the Simeon discovers, is not rooted in present circumstances. Our peace does not ebb and flow each day or each hour based on how things are presently going. No, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:14 "Christ himself is our peace." As one writer has put it, "Safety does not consist in the absence of danger but the presence of God." Though, in this world, we face trouble, we can take heart, for Christ has overcome the world. We will face pain, but we will never face irredeemable pain if we are in the hands of the Lord.

This Christmas, I pray that our eyes might be opened to this good news. For this same hope that Simeon encounters extends to us as well.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What stood out to you in the text / sermon today?
2. What is causing you anxiety and fear right now? How might God speak into that fear?
3. What is shaping your perspective and your desires these days?
4. How might you cultivate a life of prayerful expectancy?
5. Simeon says he has seen salvation with his own eyes. Where have you seen signs of God's salvation and peace in your life?