

## **Dec 28      My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation**

Luke 2:22-40

It is so easy to become discouraged by the events of life. As we approach the end of one year and prepare to welcome another year we can feel like the writer of Ecclesiastes. We know that famous poem of there is a time for everything under heaven. It ends, "What do workers gain from all their hard work?" This is the pessimistic view of life. People are born, people die, there are joys and sorrows and life just goes grinding along and we receive little if any benefit from our hard work. Simeon presents the other view. He had been told in a dream that he would not die before he had seen the promised Messiah. We are not told how long before his encounter with the Holy Family this dream had taken place, but you suspect that it had been some time, possibly years, before. It says he had waited eagerly and anticipated the restoration of Israel. Even though life had gone on, day after day, with no observable change he greeted each day with anticipation. Ultimately he was not disappointed. Led by the spirit he goes to the temple. I can picture that scene. I am sure, like all of us, he entered with anticipation for he somehow knew today was the day. I am guessing that he would have first scurried from one family to the next of the wealthy and important people who were in the temple. Some inner voice kept saying, "no not them." Finally I see him stopping, taking a deep breath to clear his mind and saying something like this, "God, my expectations are getting in the way. Open my eyes to see your work, your glory wherever it is to be found." Then, following that prayer he began to scan the crowds again. He notices a couple, nothing remarkable about them. She is holding a small child, he protectively hovering. His heart skips a beat and he is aware this is the child; this is the long awaited messiah. He didn't care that he wasn't from a wealthy family. He knew God could do anything God wanted to do. He scurries over to the family, holds out his hands and asks if he could hold the child. As he does, a warm glow fills his body and he says, "Now I can die in peace. I have seen your salvation." Mary and Joseph are amazed and to add to that amazement a prophetess named Anna comes and confirms Simeon's words. For Joseph and Mary who would remember the visitations of the angels it would all be a bit overwhelming. I can imagine the conversations they had on the way home.

Back to the question I posed as I began. As we begin this year how can we approach it with anticipation instead of resignation? How can we look forward with hope instead of despair? How can we move forward with trust instead of dread?

Simeon believed God was at work bringing about the restoration of Israel. We can guess that his view on this was the one currently held, and that is that God would send a messiah to defeat the Romans and restore the Davidic monarchy. He looked eagerly for signs that God's plan was beginning and he did it each and every day. Why did he not get discouraged or filled with despair. He believed that God's timing was best. He believed that God cared and loved the people of Israel. And so even though many days had gone by where nothing had happened he awoke each morning with that thought, "Perhaps today is the day!"

What are you seeking for eagerly this coming year? Be honest with yourself. Some of the things we seek are not so high and noble. Perhaps we are hoping that a family member will visit this year. Or maybe as we begin a new year we are seeking for ways to end a conflict. But maybe, just maybe, we are seeking even bigger things. Perhaps we are anticipating God doing a new thing and peace might happen in the middle east, or we are anticipating a year where we get a clean bill of health after having years of disease hanging over our heads. Maybe we are anticipating an end to loneliness. None of these things have happened yet but perhaps today is the day. If we approach each day with eager anticipation then we will not easily give into despair because we know God loves, God cares, and if not today then tomorrow God may do a great thing.

After many years of sectarian violence with many calls for peace on both sides the ongoing strife in Northern Ireland raged unabated. On August 10, 1976, a runaway car driven by an IRA member, Danny Lennon, crashed into a family of four who were out for a walk. (Lennon had been fatally shot while fleeing from British soldiers.) All three children, Joanne, John, and Andrew, were killed. Their mother, Anne Maguire, was critically injured and later committed suicide in 1980. Betty Williams a mother raised in Belfast but never part of any movement had been driving home from visiting her mother, heard the crash, and was the first to arrive on the scene. Betty immediately

began to circulate petitions against the violence and, in less than forty-eight hours, had over six thousand signatures. When Mairead Corrigan, the children's aunt, heard what Betty Williams had done, she invited her to the children's funeral. On August 13, 1976, the day of the Maguire children's funeral, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan met with journalist Ciaran McKeown, who joined the two women in co-founding the Peace People, an organization dedicated to nonviolence in Northern Ireland and throughout the world. It would have been easy to see this as just one more attempt at peace. What good could it do? Betty and Mairead organized a peace march to the graves of the children, which was attended by 10,000 Protestant and Catholic women. The peaceful march was disrupted by members of the Irish Republican Army, who accused them of being influenced by the British. The following week, 35,000 people marched with Williams and Corrigan to show their support for ending the violence in their country. Ultimately they received the Nobel Peace Prize and the Peace People became a leading force in compelling both sides in the violence to end the strife and come to a peaceful situation. No one knew the day of that car wreck that peace was beginning for Northern Ireland. That is part of the anticipation factor we are called to approach each day with.

Simeon believed God was at work transforming his life and the nation's life. He believed that he would live to see the restoration of Israel. He believed he would see the Messiah. This gave him hope. Even when the oppression from Rome would have seemed terribly burdensome he had hope because he believed in God's transforming power. Where are we called to be hopeful for transformation this day? Where do we believe we will see new life, new beginnings that will resolve some of the issues that we are facing this day? Looking and believing God is in the power of transformation gives us hope.

A woman I knew suffered from a debilitating arthritis. Now she knew that she would never be free of the pain this particular disease caused her and its other effects on her body. Yet she believed that God would help her deal with her illness and bring her as full of a life as possible. She approached each new medicine, each exercise program or surgery with hope that it would make a difference. Now you could say that it

was just the power of positive thinking, but I believe it was much deeper. She continued to live a fairly active life for many more years than doctors had thought possible. She kept her positive attitude and celebrated many victories and transforming moments. I recall her getting a motorized scooter. This was when these were quite new. Her joy at mobility was awesome. She continued to talk about how it transformed her life. Hope, believing God has a solution or a way forward with your situation is part of our task.

Finally Simon responded as he was led. This leads to trust. We too are asked to respond to those nudges of God. The more we do and see how they work out in positive ways the more likely we are to follow them, the greater our trust.

So may we all look for and experience God's saving power in our lives and those around us this year.