

SERMON: February 10, 2019 The Blessings of the Elders
TEXT: Luke 2:25-38
SUBJECT: Passing on the faith
THEME: Those who have lived the faith can give the blessing to the next generation of believers.
PURPOSE: To encourage inter-generational relationships
PIC: Simeon at the Temple

What do you think was going through Joseph and Mary's minds when some old guy grabs their baby in the Temple and starts crying and praying and telling everybody that this is going to be the Savior of the world?

Does that happen to you very often?

Who was Simeon? We don't know anything about him, other than this story. But let's look at what we DO know –

He was a Jewish man, evidently old. He had seen a lot in his lifetime. When he was a young boy he had worshipped in Zerubbabel's temple here on the mountain in Jerusalem. When he was a grown man, he watched as Herod the Great renovated the Temple to make it larger, grander, and beautiful.

The scriptures say that Simeon was "waiting for the consolation of Israel." As he regularly and strolled through the new, shiny, rebuilt Temple, he was uneasy. Herod was a great builder, but he was also loyal to Rome. And so one of the things that he did was to build the Temple in such a way that he could keep an eye on it –

I have a picture here of what it would have looked like – you can see the Temple courts and the Temple in the middle, but do you notice what is all around the roof which is over the corridors?



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5e/Second_Temple_view.jpg

Roman army soldiers. Rome kept a constant guard patrolling this upper-deck so they could see what was happening all of the time.

The Romans knew that, if revolt came from the Jewish people, it would most likely start through their religion. So they watched closely. Just as an aside, they would have noticed when Jesus cleared the Temple during that last week He spent here on earth. Up until this point they probably had not even paid attention to Jesus – but that certainly got them watching, then!

How would we feel if there were surveillance cameras here in our sanctuary, with government officials watching and listening in to everything we do?

So the consolation of Israel that Simeon was praying for, the hope that he had, was that God would send a redeemer, the Messiah, to restore what was broken. The Christ would be the one who brought the people back to God.

Unfortunately, everybody had their own idea of what was broken, and what God needed to do to repair it! It's like in politics today – all sides want America to be great, but we can't agree on what that greatness looks like. Is it military strength? Is it financial domination? Is it to be a light of hope to the world? Is it to be a shelter for those who have no freedom where they are?

This is the same dilemma that was facing Israel at this time – for some, they thought the Messiah was going to be a military leader who would raise up an army (or use God's army) and drive out the Romans. For others, it was to be a great spiritual teacher who would reveal to them the mysteries of God. Everyone had their own idea of who the Messiah should be – but they all had one thing in common –

No one expected a baby!

I wonder what Simeon was thinking that particular day. It says that he hadn't planned on going to the Temple at all. Our scripture says that the Holy Spirit "moved him" to go to the Temple courts!

So he went. But what had he been doing? He may have been there quite a while, scanning the crowd, looking around, trying to find someone who fit the image –

"Nope, too poor. Nope, too busy. Nope, not really interested in the faith; you can tell that he's just offering his sacrifices for the show of it. Who is it, Lord?"

"That couple over there? I don't know, Lord, he's got a family. It would be hard to lead a great revolution with a wife and a new baby in tow. Sure, he looks strong – probably a construction worker of some sort...A carpenter? Yeah, I can see that. Good for rebuilding. But still, he doesn't seem like a person who can inspire the masses.

"What, not him? Is there someone behind him? I'm not sure I follow You, Lord. You said 'that family'. He's the only one there..."

"Look again? Well, I just see the man, and his young wife, and it looks like a week-old baby. It's just him there –

"Not the woman, Lord. And certainly not the..."

“The BABY?”

THIS is different! This isn't what they were expecting! A baby is just too...young, and fragile, and inexperienced! God, we want something done NOW – we don't have time for this baby to grow up!

But God insists, and Simeon thinks it over – maybe that DOES make more sense. The prophecies talk about a gentle leader, a man of love, one familiar with sorrows. Maybe this redemption that God is talking about is something deeper than just political authority.

Simeon goes over and greets the family, and takes the baby and lifts him up and starts praising God to the whole congregation – and what did the rest of the people think? His friends, the priests, the Roman guards who would have been listening -

“Has Simeon lost it? Well, he IS getting old, and we've been worried about him for a while now. But now he's saying that this baby is the Messiah? What good is that going to do?

In the midst of this scripture, we find a something unexpected, something that we should know, but we often overlook. People may have discounted Simeon because he is old now, and can't fight and has a hard time seeing and maybe many people consider him to be past his prime – but here he is, doing what he can. And what he does is to bless this young family and their baby as they come into the Temple.

What I hear is

God always has a place for us.

It doesn't matter how old or how young we think we are; it doesn't matter how wealthy or whether our hearing is good or bad. ***The power of God doesn't depend upon our strength, but upon our willingness to let God work through us.***

We're kind of at the extremes of life here – Simeon, old and not able to do much anymore; Mary and Joseph and Jesus – young, but without much power or authority.

Add in the second part of our scripture with Anna, and we get an even bigger disparity between what the world thinks is power, and what God is actually doing –

In the middle of the might of Rome, eyes watching all around them –

In the middle of the Great Temple, with its leaders and gold and centuries of tradition

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In the middle of a huge, bustling city, a simple exchange takes place –

The elders bless the next generation of believers.

You know, since I moved here I have had quite a lot of you tell me that you don't want to be known as just a "retired church" – you don't want to be a place where the average age of the worshippers over the speed limit!

I go around the island, and I see young people all of the time! On my way here to church this morning I passed (enter number) of people out on their bicycles, running, with their kids alongside of them!



<https://www.collierschools.com/cms/lib/FL01903251/Centricity/Domain/56/TBE%20Logo%202017.JPG>

I go just a quarter-mile away and I find young families, children, teenagers at the "Y" and at Tommie Barfield Elementary! Every Tuesday through Friday we have over 30 children under the age of 5 and their families here on our property!

The young families are all around us! Is God asking us to bless them?

Think back about your own life – who have been the "elders" who first brought the blessing to you?

For some of you, it may have been a Sunday School teacher. For some, it may have been your grandmother. It might have been a friend, or maybe you first heard about Jesus on the TV or the radio.

But all of us heard the message of hope from someone else – and we now take our place in the long line of believers that stretches back and forwards to eternity!

The Gospel always comes to us on the way to somebody else.

Simeon and Anna didn't come to the Temple just to worship privately and then to go home and just watch after themselves. Simeon was there, praying for the healing of the nation that he loved! Anna was there daily serving and worshipping, and when she saw the young family, she "spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."

We have some very visionary leaders here in our congregation. They are looking forward to the future. They are asking, "What's going to happen when we are gone? Are we leaving a legacy that will continue to lift up the name of Jesus to those who come after us?"

In one of our discussions recently we were talking about the future, and someone suggested that "once we're gone, the next generation of retirees will move down here and take our place."

No! That's not going to happen! The people retiring today have NEVER GONE TO CHURCH!!! They are not going to automatically start coming to church once they leave their businesses!

If we want for Jesus to be lifted up 5/10/15 years from now, we have to start blessing the younger people now. We have to decide if what we're building is for us, or for them. Our Bible studies, our worship styles, our times, our buildings – do they reflect what we like, or what God can use to draw new people in to Himself?



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This week we are having our annual "Strawberry Festival". Think of the hundreds, maybe thousands of people that God is going to send here. Why is He sending them here? Just to buy strawberries? Just so we can make some money?

What if there is a deeper reason that God is sending them here – ***so that they can find the hope and healing that they need through the presence of Jesus Christ?***

God has not given up on us! He is calling us to be on mission! He is asking us to start looking around, and to share the blessing with those whom we meet!

We're going to have a prayer table. We are going to need parking lot attendants. We are going to have a drawing for prizes to give away, and we're going to need people the following week to call everybody who turns in a ticket to connect with them and to find out how we can bless them.

You can be a part of this. Like Simeon and Anna, you still have a very important role to play in how God wants to bless this earth!

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We are planning on a Facilities expansion, with our Gathering Place and clean bathrooms and our Fellowship Hall. And the question is, "How can God use these new spaces to draw people to Himself?"

Now, here's the most amazing part – ***when we focus on giving away the blessings that God has given to us, we find that we have even more blessings than before!***

Churches that focus on reaching the lost grow. Congregations that are constantly asking, "How can God use this (event) to reach someone new?" – are healthier than those who just make everything about what THEY like.

Many of you have heard of "Grace Place" – it's an outreach ministry that in Naples that we support.



 http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-nmbNBjI6zIk/UZpmwDP09PI/AAAAAAAAAo/jE78hs8j_Ew/w1200-h630-p-k-no-nu/grace+place.jpg

What you may not know is that it came out of a church that was dying. They realized that the people like them – the white, upper-middle class working folk who had made up their congregation for decades – were not there anymore. They were in a changing community, and the faces they saw inside the church didn't reflect the faces they saw outside the church in their community.

So they decided to change. It was more important to them that Jesus continue His work, not that they continue to do their own thing.

Out of much pain and prayer came a place where the name of Jesus was still spoken, albeit with a different accent. And Jesus is still being lifted up.

Our community is changing. But God is not done with us. Imagine the joy of Simeon and Anna as they saw the new promise that God had for His people! God was honoring the promise that He had made to them, and they got to be a part of His next steps.

God is not done with us yet. It's not time to retire. There are children to be read to at Tommie Barfield. There are families to be welcomed at our Mother's Morning Out. There are lost people speaking German and Spanish and French along our beaches. There are people that God loves who need to know that He cares.

How can God use you to bless those who will be next in bringing the world to Him?

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⁵ 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. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ 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, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "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."

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.