

Sunday December 19, 2021

Lesson 3: Waiting for Prophecy to Be Fulfilled

Scripture: Luke 2: 25-38

Context:

The winter Adult Bible Studies Curriculum continues its focus on the season of Advent with stories from the birth narratives of Jesus. The focus of the unit is on how we can engage in practices and means to connect to God. As we participate in the communities we live in, we discover God is already at work and invites us to continue to lend our gifts and graces to the good work to God's goodness.

The first unit has examined waiting and how patiently waiting can lead us to places we could never go on our own. God has a way of giving us surprises as we wait as found in the season of Advent. The third season introduces us to Simeon and Anna, two individuals who demonstrate how waiting and expectation can lead to wonder and inspire faithfulness.

As with most of the birth narratives, the account of these individuals comes from the gospel of Luke. This passage comes after Jesus has been born and he is ready to be presented and dedicated in the Temple according to the Law of Moses. As a young infant, Jesus goes to Jerusalem, the place he would later die. This setting of the story illustrates how Luke wants us to know Jesus' upbringing in a family who followed meticulously the law of Moses.¹ These two events were separate regulations brought together: the purification of the mother after childbirth and the dedication of the firstborn son to God.² This trip to the Temple will foreshadow Christ's ministry and reveal how he is the Messiah.

At the Temple, there are two people who know the true identity of the child. The first comes from Simeon, a man filled by the Holy Spirit who has been promised he would not die until he saw God's Christ. The Holy Spirit leads him to the Temple on the day Christ arrives. He can now die after holding this six-week old baby who will deliver hope and redeem the world. His song has become known as *Nunc Dimittis*, inspired by the first two words in the Latin, translated in English as "Now let depart."³ Simeon's words are powerful as he proclaims Jesus as the light of the world, the one who will light the way for both Gentiles and Israelites. Mary and Joseph are astounded at the words of the older man. Simeon blesses the parents and forewarns Mary how a sword will pierce her side as she watches this child grow and then die.

A prophetess Anna then comes and blesses the child. She thanks God and witnesses to what Jesus will do. She specifically addresses those concerned with the future and redemption of Jerusalem. There will be hope for all people in this child.

¹ Craddock, Fred B. "Luke," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 38.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 39.

Application

One thing I have come to notice in the Advent texts and the birth narratives are the number of people in various stages of life. Mary is a young woman, probably in her teenage years. Joseph is a young to middle-aged man. Zechariah and Elizabeth are older than the two of them, past the typical child-bearing age. Simeon and Anna are perhaps the oldest, as we are even given an age when it comes to Anna at eighty-four years old. And then of course, we have the tiny infants when John the Baptist is born, followed by his younger cousin, Jesus.

For me, this is one of the most beautiful aspects of these narratives. We are reminded of how no matter our age, God has a role for us in God's story. No one is exempt because they are too young or too old. God gives everyone an opportunity to share in the good news and celebrate the presence of Christ in our lives. Everyone is invited to sing or prophesize about what will be done.

It is no secret people wonder about what will happen to the church, especially the United Methodist Church, when it comes to age and the numbers present. Most churches will tell you there are more grey hairs (or covered up grey hairs) than younger individuals. There's always the concern of where are the young people, or where are the children.

And while there may need to be things done to give opportunities for families and children or young adults, I cannot help but think about how God might be calling those in the pews to see themselves as gifts to the church and the world. In these Advent and birth narratives, God was at work in the lives of all those whether they were young and old. They were important to the story of God and they helped to herald the coming of Christ into the world.

In today's text, we see how two older individuals gave to us the example of worship as they testified to God in the past, the present, and the future. Simeon knew the Holy Spirit well and could testify to what God was doing in his life. He saw the Christ child and was able to encourage and bless the parents with the entrusted role of raising the babe. He could now die, knowing the Christ child was present in the world. Simeon knew the power of witnessing, telling others the good news of Jesus Christ.

Anna showed to us the importance of service. After her husband died, she found her role and place in serving and leading the Temple with her prayers and devotion. When the Christ child came, she then knew her role to tell others the good news and to proclaim with excitement of Jerusalem's hope with the Christ child.

As we read the story of these two individuals, I hope we all find inspiration for how God is calling us to be in our communities of faith. Maybe your church isn't bursting to the brim with little ones. Yet I hope and know you can find the ways to reach and love on others. You can pray for our teachers and school faculty who everyday pour into the children. If you have children, even if it's three of them or visiting grandchildren, you can print off coloring sheets or read Bible stories to them when they come. When there's a chance to teach Sunday school or whatever is the equivalent in your church when it comes to little ones, don't hesitate to teach or lead in starting one. God can use your wisdom and your faith experience to help a little one grow.

During the season of Advent, we await the Christ child and marvel at what he will do in our lives. Yet we are also reminded as we expect great things from God, God wants

us to be part of the story as well. No one is too young or too old to play a role in God's story. God needs everyone to tell the good news of Jesus Christ in this world.

How have you felt the Holy Spirit nudge you like Simeon? What is the Holy Spirit prodding you to do when it comes to reaching out to others? How can being present like Anna in the Temple be something for you to do in the church? What is the gift of your age, whatever it may be, in what you can offer to Christ's church? Who are the figures like Anna and Simeon who inspire you in your journey of faith?

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