

“Eyes That Behold the Salvation of God”

First Sunday of Christmas

Grace Lutheran Church

Pastor Troy E. Medlin

“Now Lord, you let your servant go in peace, your word has been fulfilled, my own eyes have seen the salvation...which you have prepared in the sight of every people.....”

I cannot sing/hear the song of Simeon, from our gospel, without thinking of Compline, which is the service of night prayer that Christians have been praying at the end of their days in some form or another for centuries...just as in morning prayer we sing the song of Zacharias and evening prayer we sing with Mary...in night prayer...we join our voices to the song of Simeon...(look at in the LBW...and I encourage you to make it a prayer practice...)

In January of 2018 I spent about 10 days or so at a Lutheran retreat center called *Holden Village* in the wilderness of the Cascade mountains in Washington State (ask me more about it sometime :)).....I was there with a group from my seminary...and one of things we did was we prayed Compline...every night....it was quite powerful, there in a wilderness area...the place with the least light pollution I had ever been....blanketed with darkness.. And oftentimes our only light while we prayed would be the flickering of candles in our hands.... As we sat in a circle... our voices echoing those of Christians throughout the ages....after long days of work and toil...life in the world... We like Simeon commend our lives to God..the one who does not slumber or sleep...and in whose hands we commend our spirits, souls, and bodies...into whose hands we commend our whole lives.... Just before we...fragile and tired...lay down...because unlike God...and unlike what the world wants us to believe....we need slumber and sleep....

That time spent at Holden, praying Compline had an impact on me....the prayers of morning, evening, and night will get into your bones....if you pray them regularly...so I encourage you to pray them...by yourself, or with family....in your homes... and even outside sometimes... as a part of your devotional life...

We find the origin of Simeon's song in Luke chapter 2, so we pick up where we left off in the gospel on Christmas Eve....We are told..Simeon could not see death before he saw the Lord's messiah....so when that time had come....or as our Galatians reading puts it....*in the fullness of time*....when Mary and Joseph had brought the baby Jesus to the temple...our text gives us this beautiful, striking line...

“Simeon took him in his arms....and began to say...” At long last...he held that little baby, God's own son, our redeemer, in his arms...through the eyes of faith...he sees that the Salvation of God has come close, has come near to him....And...he could finally fall asleep, his day could come to

an end.....and rest in peace....For God's new light...was dawning at the close of his days...and so he began to say...began to sing.....his song...

Simeon is able to die now, to entrust his days into the care of that little baby...who holds all days in his hands....for his eyes have seen the Lord's messiah...

On Wednesday of this week Pastor Lyle was able to baptize someone here at Grace...with only a few people present...on a weekday...because, pandemic...David and Carrie Simpon's grandson Wyatt James Carletti Simpson was baptized into Jesus Christ....he died with Christ and rose with Christ to new life...and was given all of the promises of God....and we give thanks, that God's word and water joined together work the miracle of new birth...even on a cloudy and sleepy weekday morning....in a quiet and nearly empty church...Alleluia, indeed for that....

Any Baptism is an invitation for us to reflect on our own baptisms and our own lives that are now defined by our baptisms...A pastor once said that Christians all *walk wet* and that is exactly right....once we are baptized *that is who we are* and all of our lives are now spent living out the realities of what happened in those waters...to Wyatt on Wednesday and to all of us...you can think about it in terms of diving deeper and deeper into an ocean...the ocean of God's mercy....there is always more depth to explore and more treasures to discover....

In our baptisms...we confess that we have died to sin...baptism is a form of dying.... And we renounce the powers of sin and all of sins empty promises....saying in effect...that we have died to sin and all of its lies and will no longer live entrapped by them...and *this* water-washed life of ours...is spent dying every day....

To self centeredness, to greed, to hungering after power, to being swayed by the illusion of control, to the constant need to defend ourselves....dying to the systems of racism and white supremacy that insist that everything is fine and we all just need to work harder and pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, the lie that we all have always had the same opportunities....to the lies and empty promises of a culture that says we are defined by our work...and our successes...or our failure...baptism...means dying to those things...and more...every day... and being reminded that in those waters...we have already died to them in the only death that really matters....

...We have also already been raised to new life....and given the Holy Spirit....who empowers us and gives us all we need to die to those things....daily....and to walk in that resurrection life... saying yes...to all of God's promises...every day....saying yes to who we are...as our Isaiah reading reminds us....we are those who have been clothed with the garments of salvation...and covered with the robe of righteousness... also in our baptisms...people dressed like that...like us...we say yes...every day to...

To the promises we make when we affirm God's promises to us in baptism....to live among God's faithful people,

to hear his Word and share in his supper,

to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,

to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus,

and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

This is what we do...now that God has made us who we are!

We rise daily to live lives nourished by God's word and meal, sharing our faith in our vocations and families....lives of service to others, turned toward our neighbors.....and we rise daily to work for justice and peace in all the earth...each of us in our own way...bearing witness to our life in Christ....living as those who have died and risen...and whose lives journeys are spent walking that same damp path that Wyatt began on wednesday...

Simeon...is able to die now in peace....for his eyes have seen God's salvation....and still dripping with God's promises....we, people of God...through our own eyes...the eyes of faith...we now...can die...in peace...every day and every night....to all of the false promises of the world...and we can rise...every morning to serve...every morning to find that the little baby who Simeon held, now holds us... in our dying and in our rising...we can rise no longer enslaved to sin, no longer curved in on ourselves....as Luther put it...but we can rise each day...turned outward...free to see our neighbor....and free to spend our lives in love of our neighbor.... This is resurrection life.... And...we can rise each day....with our ears attuned only to the song of our salvation...which reminds us that we are enough, we are forgiven, we are cherished, and we are beloved....not as we should be...but exactly as who we are...a song of love and leads us to sing songs of trust..and not to the songs of this world that lull us into fear....

Clothed and covered....we become who we are....each and every day!

And...when we lay down to sleep each night...we can make the sign of the cross...the same made at our baptisms....and entrust our life and all our days to the one who goes into the night before us.... That we too have seen the Lord's messiah...and with him we have died the only death that matters...and filled with his presence we need not fear the night or the grave....as Simeon held him...he holds us...and we too have risen to new life....our resurrection...that of course, testifies to that day of resurrection when night will be no more...and we live with God forever....

So let us sing...all our days...in the morning...and in the evening...and in the night....with our words and actions...and with all our hearts...having heard the gospel song of our newborn king....the song of salvation....ringing throughout the ages....the song that was sung over us in baptism...

Stirred and strengthened by that song...we too now join the chorus begun with Simeon....

“Now Lord, you let your servant go in peace, your word has been fulfilled, my own eyes have seen the salvation...which you have prepared in the sight of every people.....”