

Jesus was still in diapers when his parents brought him to the temple in Jerusalem to "present him to the Lord" as the custom was and offer a sacrifice, and that's when old Simeon spotted him. Years before, he'd been told he wouldn't die until he'd seen the Messiah with his own two eyes, and time was running out. When the moment finally came, one look through his cloudy eyes was all it took. He asked if it would be all right to hold the baby in his arms, and they told him to go ahead but be careful not to drop him.

The old man, full of awe and wonder, the baby perhaps tugging at the fringes of his beard said, "Lord, now your servant can depart in peace, according to your word, for mine eyes have seen *your* salvation." The parents were pleased as punch, and so he blessed them too, for good measure. *Then* ... something ... about the mother... stopped him, and his expression changed. What he saw in her face... was a long way off, but was there so plainly, he couldn't pretend. "This child," Simeon said, "...is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce your own soul, too, Mary." He would have bitten off his tongue than said it, but in that holy place he felt he had no choice. Then he handed her back the baby and departed in something less than the perfect peace he dreamed of through the long years of waiting. (Brueggemann; *Peculiar Treasures*)

You know, I have always loved this story of Simeon and this year is no exception. And not because of the fact that I can relate to this story so well, at least, the waiting aspect of it. In fact, I often find that waiting is not one of my greatest virtues, not even close. I don't even like to wait in a fast, food line very long. So, how in the world does one wait a lifetime ... for hope of a better world? How can a person live through tragedy, war, and oppression without losing hope that there will one day, be peace? How can one wait for the vindication - for God's justice of a people, in fact, a whole nation, and still be hopeful while you wait? And how can a centuries' old promise of freedom for captives and those under the oppressive laws of the Roman Empire, lend itself to the hope of an elderly man?" And how does one, perhaps me and maybe you, wait in hope for something to change? You see, there's this hope that is already here with the coming of the Christ child, but there's this "not yet" kind of hope - the kind of hope we experience during Advent - and maybe, just maybe live in throughout the year.

So perhaps before the manger is put away, the tree is down and all the cookies are consumed, it may be worth our while to revisit the story of Simeon and how he waited an entire lifetime for a promise to be fulfilled. And...as soon as he gets a glimpse of what he had been waiting for, longing for, hoping for....as soon as he actually cradles the baby in his arms... Simeon (he) dies. Simeon's life comes to a close just as he "*holds*" the hope for a better "tomorrow." Not just for him. Not just for Israel. But for all people, Gentile and Jew alike.

It has always seemed so unfair to me that Simeon, this devout and righteous man - this steadfast old man clinging to his Jewish heritage with aging eyes clouded over by cataracts and hands misshapen from arthritis - does not get to see the comprehensive fulfillment of God's gift come to its full fruition in his lifetime. But guess what? Neither do we. You see, we, too, are left holding the baby and still wondering how the impact of this child will bring peace, justice and a deeper love for a world (right now). A world reeling from the atrocities of war, oppression, pain, injustice, and political, geographical, and religious division.

But I believe, this unfolding narrative in Luke's gospel today, portrayed through this tired, old man named Simeon, is not only essential for the hope we proclaim *during* the Advent season, and born on Christmas day, but this narrative is also essential for the hope which propels us forward - beyond the manger, beyond... the birth. So before we travel too far from Bethlehem, we need to get a good grasp on the significance of Simeon's story. On the significance of God's promise fulfilled in a moment in time; on the significance of a promise fulfilled in the midst of humanity's brokenness. The significance of how we, too, live into a promise fulfilled - and not yet. Simeon spent his lifetime waiting, hoping, and longing - even *touching* the light that would overcome the darkness. And the writer of Luke, today, invites *us, too*, to *live into* God's promises and experience the sweet release of peace found in the midst of suffering and injustice. This story not only looks retrospectively, or looks back at the long-awaited hope of God's faithfulness, but this hope looks forward - toward a future hope. Hope, here...but not yet.

And I don't know about you... but for me, it's hard to live in the space between the birth of Jesus - between the beauty of the manger, and the second coming of Christ. And as Christians, that is exactly what we are called to do; we are called to live in the "middle" and wait expectantly for hope, peace, joy and love to be fulfilled. To let the wonder, and the mystery, still linger in our hearts. And O boy, this is not easy. Keeping hope alive, for me, while watching tens of thousands of Palestinians die under the rubble of bombs, is not easy. Keeping that hope alive while families and loved ones are still in captivity and the atrocities on October 7th are still fresh in the minds of those who survived. Keeping hope alive, while the Ukrainian war has lingered and lives have been altered forever,

is not easy. Or watching thousands walk thousands of miles, over rough terrain, in hopes of a better future for their children, is not easy. Waiting, and keeping hope alive is... hard. Waiting for the fulfillment of God's promise, of peace on earth and peace in our hearts, is..hard.

One of the prayer services I listened to from Christmas Lutheran Church last week focused on hope. Hope in the midst of all the suffering, for Palestinian Christians and for their Jewish friends. And I was amazed at how they somehow seem to grasp this hope of now...and not yet. *They know..* as they look back at God's faithfulness and where it has carried them through heartache and tragedy thus far, *is* the hope of tomorrow...the "not yet" kind of hope - still lingers in that promise of a better tomorrow. Of a vindication of a people who have been hostile and kept them living in occupation for years. You know...I long to know more about that hope. I long to understand how, they hang on to hope. I want to grasp that kind of hope for those who have lost loved ones to tragic deaths, cyclic addiction, suicide or senseless gun violence. I want to learn how to keep hope alive - the not-yet kind of hope that has the ability to fill us with great joy.

Hope for a world in need of a grand reversal - one that comes through the solidarity of God's love for his children - through the eyes of the Christ child. You see, the writer of Luke's gospel places a great deal of importance on the type of freedom... liberation - which both Simeon and the prophet Anna are witness to... but not in the context of individual peace, or of a longed-for heavenly home - but rather... a divine agenda. And agenda which brings good news to the poor, good news to the marginalized, good news to those who have been left out due to the color of their skin, their gender identity, socio-economic status or simply their geographic location... liberation and freedom - good news to you...and to me. And it dawned on me after the Thursday's worship ... how *did* Simeon do it? How did he wait, and wait and wait? Well...I have a feeling that his waiting was not done in isolation. Afterall, how would he know that Jesus was coming to the temple "that day?" The writer doesn't tell us he is a priest that had to be in the temple every day. I surmise, this is the place where his hope stayed alive. You see, the hope this *extra-ORDINARY* baby brings to us, is one found in community. It is found through you and me and throughout the body of Christ. A hope held...and a hope shared.

For Simeon and Anna, waiting and longing for the restoration of Israel, would bring hope for all humanity, not just this pivotal moment in time. This child...this baby... who could have been born anywhere, in any number of ways which would have commanded attention, comes in light of an ordinary birth. But with extra-ordinary attentiveness to the cries of people everywhere who long for justice and peace. But along with this fulfillment of a lifetime of living in hope - comes the not-yet hope of the future and the uncertainty it brings. Because after this celebrated moment - the moment where Simeon holds the baby, he turns to the mom and says, "This child is destined for the falling and rising

of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and a sword will pierce *your* heart.”

Not what you would expect as a congratulatory and cordial greeting to a new mother. Not what you would expect after such a joyous occasion; not what you would expect after holding the Son of God. You know...sometimes.. our expectations are disrupted and our longings go unfulfilled and hope wanes. Sometimes... we want to know that with the coming of the Christ child - with the coming of enough money, with the coming of the right test result, with the coming of sobriety, with the coming of the right spouse, or partner or relationship, with the coming of (that) we will have lived into the fullness of the liberation of the baby.

But thankfully, gratefully, we don't have to live under the law of our own expectations or those of others... we are not bound by their outcomes. Simeon wasn't... and neither are we. You see, God's not done yet. The good tidings of great joy are not done yet. Not for me, not for you, and not for all of creation. AND that...is the good news of an “extra” ordinary birth. The hope of the tiny baby comes to humanity and lives...yes, lives... in the midst of us - in that “waiting space.”

You know, sometimes, I would like to linger in the manger - I would like to stay in the birth story where newness resides and hope is born. But that's not where we are called to stay. We are called to be active participants in this story. We are to live into the “already” hope... and the not yet hope - of the fulfillment of God's promises. The same hope, peace, joy and love that ushered us into Advent is ushering us out, too. Out into a new year, but deeply impacted by the *extra ORDINARY* hope of a baby. You know, Simeon got to hold the baby.....and so do we. Amen.