

Spiritual Sight and Old Eyes

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight oh Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.*

I envy you all.

Well, not all of you.

If you are younger than me, sorry, not you,
at least not for my purposes in this sermon.

And also, for the purposes of this sermon, not for the best of reasons.

You see, you've already settled matters of what to do with your life,
(and quite frankly, the years left you can expect to have to keep doing life are fewer than mine)
and you don't have to face the same problems as younger generations,
and you don't expect to be screwed over at every turn.

You had different problems, I'm sure. But the grass is always greener elsewhere.

I saw recently a statistic that said

80% of college students were optimistic about their future.

That sounds ridiculously high to me, though I wish it were true.

What I see paints a darker more nihilistic picture that expects societal collapse

There is a prevalence of the axiom: Life sucks and then you die.

And there is a desire to avoid the life part that sucks so much.

Do you know what one of the most common "selling points" is for games,
whether they be video games or mobile games on your phone? - that they are addicting.

There are actually advertisements for games depicting someone playing the game so intently
that they neglect their jobs and ignore their children.

It is common knowledge that such games are purposely designed to be addicting,
and their users praise it for that very reason.

Somehow we are in a world where we are comfortable essentially giving up bits of our free will
to whatever is shiny and promises to keep us distracted from reality,

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because reality sucks.

Honestly, I kind of get it... I don't agree, but I get it.

Things can get theologically disturbing down these mental paths.

Among those willing to entertain the existence of God,
one can imagine Him to be cruel simply because he gave us life.

Yes, it is quite possible to hate God for the very reason that God is good.

-as weird as I hope that sounds.

Often the conversations I have with my peers devolves to questions of whether we are in *Fahrenheit 451*, *1984*, *Brave New World*, or some other dystopia, or all of them at once.

Such are the stories with which we try to understand what is going on around us,
and for the most part I'm glad we have those dystopian novels that help us in that and
alert us to potential problems.

But I'm far more grateful for the sacred stories
that allow deeper meaning and hope to be revealed within the real world.

Today's gospel reading is definitely included in that.

As per Leviticus 12:1-8, Mary brought the baby Jesus to the Temple
to be dedicated to God after her forty days of purification.

They offer two pigeons, which according to Leviticus is the prescribed offering "if she is unable to
afford a lamb" - the preferred standard offering.

This detail again highlights the humbleness and poverty of Jesus' earthly life.

But then there are these two interactions that according to Luke, left Mary and Joseph amazed...and
they remember already knew that their child "will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High,"
that He "will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end."

as that is what Gabriel had said.

I'm going to work backwards from this point.

"There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of great age..."

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There is some confusion as to just how old Anna was - some versions say she was a widow to the age of 84, some say that she was a widow 84 years.

My reading of the Greek favors the latter, which if the case, adding the

84 years of widowhood,

7 years of marriage, and let's say

+ 14 years before that,

Anna gets to be 105 years old.

While there's all sorts of cool numerical significance and symbolism,

it remains that either way, she is older than I am.

It is curious that Luke includes more information about her herself than about what she says.

We have an age, ancestry, parentage, life story...more than we have about Simeon.

And this information tells us that Anna had been living a pious life

focussed on God for a good long while,

that her relationship with God was so intense she had the gift of prophecy.

And she arrives on the scene at Jesus' fortieth day dedication in the Temple and praises God

- seems like something that fits her character profile -

and she speaks about the child.

Luke doesn't tell us **WHAT** she said, but he does say **WHO** she was saying it to,

those looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

She was able to recognize that this child whose parents couldn't even afford a lamb,

was what would answer the concerns

of those looking for things to be set to rights.

As for Simeon, though we know less about him,

Luke makes it clear that this was a righteous and devout man,

and that the Holy Spirit was with him.

And his understanding is consonant with Anna's.

When he tells Mary

"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel"

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he is talking about that same putting to rights of the world,
or as Mary herself was saying earlier
about tearing tyrants from their thrones and exalting the humble.

This idea comes up time and again, that
“those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
the rising and falling of many.

That thing that God does, this Jesus child is destined to do.
Simeon further recognizes the danger and pain that will be involved,
and he foretells that Jesus will be opposed,
and that a sword will pierce Mary’s soul.

He speaks about the revealing of hidden thoughts
and I’m sure many would prefer their thoughts remain hidden.

There is something powerful and even threatening
in what other people probably see as just a boy like any other.
The deep connection the likes of Simeon and Anna have with God
reveals something special and deeper united to the ordinary.
Simeon of course says more than just about soul-piercing swords,
and he’s better known for this other bit.

In fact, you can look in the handy hymnal in front of you
and check out the very last last pages before the indices.

Number 603, 604, and 605. Yeah, we have three renditions of Simeon’s song.
That we don’t know and don’t sing, because we don’t know, because we don’t use...

You can thank me later for not messing with that.

Simeon had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Messiah,
and that it was by that Holy Spirit that Simeon decided to go to the Temple that day.

And he says

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,

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*according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the gentiles,
and glory to your people Israel”*

I think it's safe to say that Simeon didn't have that mindset I described earlier, such as he would be so relieved that he is finally allowed to die and be done with life.

Rather, now that he has held the Life of the World in his arms,
he felt that he could face even death with peace of soul.

These words are usually given a more generalized meaning when they are used in the context of worship. To depart not from life, but into life.

Because in seeing the Christ child,
or even the image of him within one another, we can face even life,
and find it to be richer than can be seen at a superficial level.

*Now to the One
who by the power at work within us
is able to do far more abundantly
than all we can ask or imagine,
to God be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus
to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.*