

Luke 2:22-40

Maybe a few of us can, but I doubt if most of us are able to relate to Simeon. He's ready to go; to depart from the land of the living. His eyes fasten upon the child Jesus, he holds Him in his arms, and then he says, "Okay God, let death come. My bucket list is complete."

That's not where most all of us are at. We don't see ourselves as Father Time ready to pass off the torch as he leans on his cane, the old year drawing to a close. We see ourselves more as the brand new baby, smiling with rosy cheeks, ready to grab that torch from the old man and enter the new year of 2019.

Yet whether we relate to Simeon or not, the interesting thing is that the world likens us to Simeon, but it sees itself as Simeon's opposite. We Christians are viewed as the tired old man waiting here in the house of the Lord for Jesus to come. But the world sees itself as the New Year's baby ready to grab hold of life, up for any challenge it may bring, and definitely not content to sit around in some temple waiting to die and for the Lord to come.

Now this does not mean that we cannot party it up tomorrow night. Some of us will call it quits around 9:00 and go to bed, while others of us will ring in the new year with a glass of champagne, a whoop and a holler. A Christian can go either direction here. John the Baptist didn't drink, but Jesus did. So we can either be John or Jesus on New Year's Eve. Take your pick. But the truth is that whatever we do, we are Simeon whether or not we see ourselves as being like him.

Simeon is the quintessential Christian. He is the typical example of what a Christian is. We may not relate to everything about him, but we are Simeon and he is us. Simeon was ready to die. And that's us. We're not praying for death necessarily. Not today anyway. But a Christian is always ready for death to come. And this is true whether we are three or ninety-three.

Perhaps this is why we don't know Simeon's age. One of my seminary professors docked my grade on a sermon that I did for class because in my sermon I called Simeon an old man. And he was right. We assume he was old because he was ready to die. But we're not told. He might have been quite young, just in poor health. The point is that we are Simeon no matter our age. Death can and does strike the very young and the very old, and everywhere in between. And we're not just ready to die no matter our age; we're ready to depart in peace. Simeon's exact words.

We say these words. Actually we sing them at the conclusion of our Holy Communion Service. What do we think we're saying - that we're departing this altar, or this church building in peace? Maybe we are. But in truth we are Simeon telling God that we're ready to die; to depart this life in peace.

How can anyone say this...Simon or us? Well, there are two things we are told about Simeon. "*This man,*" says our text, "*was righteous and devout.*" The first of these describes his relationship to God. The second the manner in which he lived his life.

Simeon is called righteous. This has nothing to do with how he lived. He is righteous for one reason only: God declares him righteous. This is forensic justification. God pronounces Simeon to be justified. And this has nothing to do with Simeon's behavior: good or bad. He is righteous because of Christ. The child he holds in his arms is the one who has come to be Simeon's righteousness.

And not just his...yours too. Jesus is your righteousness. Your relationship to God is the same as Simeon's. It has nothing to do with your life and how you lived it. For Jesus' sake God declares you justified. There is nothing God has against you. *God justifies the ungodly* writes St. Paul. The manner in which you and I have lived has been, too often, ungodly. This does not affect your relationship to God. Christ is always your righteousness, and so God is right with you. He has declared you and all sinners justified and forgiven for Jesus' sake.

So how, therefore, will you live? Simeon lived *taking hold well*. This is what devout means. "*He was righteous and devout,*" says our text. God declared him righteous, and Simeon took hold of this well. He believed it. Simeon believed what God declared, and he lived it. Simeon shows us what it means to be a Christian. A justified sinner is always ready to die. Simeon did not first have to get right with God. For Jesus was his righteousness. Therefore he could live with joy and die in peace.

And so can you. Being a Christian does not mean we have to jump through all the hoops of the Law. We don't have to live under the burden of guilt. We don't live lacking assurance, now or when death is near. We live in Christ; in Him who is our righteousness. He jumped through every hoop for us. He died the death of the sinner so we can die in peace. There's no guess-work here. You are baptized into Christ. This means everything. You already died in your baptism. What awaits you now is life in heaven.

If you're a devout Christian then all this you know to be true for you, and it gives you joy. But not all of us are devout. Not all of us take hold well. And even if we do, we are inconsistent. Here is the good news. Jesus takes hold of you well. He's taking hold of you now, His loving words embracing you. Look at Simeon. He was holding Jesus in his arms, but in truth Jesus was holding him. That's why Simeon was ready to die. When Jesus has you, death loses its grip. And Jesus has you. That's what your baptism means for you.

Do you want to be more devout? You should. I should. We should want to take hold of Christ well. Simeon teaches us how. He went to the house of God to take hold of Jesus there. When Jesus embraces you, and the more He does, the more you embrace Him.

And so come up to His meal for you. Here you act like Simeon, taking Jesus to yourself, for He is here for you. And then you will sing with Simeon, "*Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.*" Amen.