

We may be the only Lutheran Church having our confirmation day on this, the First Sunday after Christmas. Yet our Gospel reading for today lends itself beautifully to this. In our text we meet Simeon and Anna. Although we are not told his age, I'm pretty sure that you, Thurman, are younger than Simeon. And it is most certain that you, Sunny, are decades younger than Anna.

But there is something that all four of you have in common. It's the word *waiting*. Simeon is waiting for the "*consolation of Israel*." Anna speaks of the Child Jesus "*to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem*." Both of you have been waiting for this, your confirmation day. And I hope, not to put an end to the whole grueling ordeal of studying the catechism. But rather, waiting with desire to receive the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament on this altar.

That is one thing your pastor can never teach you. Desire. You can be taught the truths of God's Word. You can be taught how to live as His baptized child. But no one can teach you desire. That would be like teaching you to be hungry. It cannot be done. Food can be prepared and set before you. You can be told to eat it. But to have the desire for it is not teachable.

It is, however, a gift that God gives. Pray for it! And I mean all of us, to start praying for desire; for God to give this gift of hungering daily, and weekly, for the food of salvation in Word and in Sacrament.

Simeon was given this gift. So was Anna. Anna spent all day, and every day, in the temple. She had no desire for things. She desired her Lord. Did she miss out on life? We might think so. But she would disagree. Her life revolved around her Lord, not around the cares and pleasures which are so desirable to us.

And Simeon? He desired to see his salvation. God had promised him that he would fasten his eyes on his salvation before he died. And so, his desire was not to enjoy life and tick off every item on his bucket list before his time was up. God gave Simeon the desire to behold his Savior.

Desire. It is not teachable. They both had it by the grace of God. And many of you here have it. I see it in you. And I pray that all of you are given this precious gift, including you, Thurman and Sunny.

Let's look closer at Simeon. We're told more about him than Anna. Both are faithful children of God. Both of them love the Lord. And here is what we are told about Simeon: "*This man*," it says, "*was righteous and devout*." Righteous with regard to God. Devout in how he was seen by others.

Righteous. A legal term. God declared him righteous. Not because Simeon did no wrong. Because he looked to God for his salvation. Simeon was waiting for the One who would set him free; his Deliverer, his Savior from sin. This man, Simeon, was righteous.

And he was devout, or we could say, devoted. This word means *taking hold well*. Other people saw Simeon doing this, and so do we. He takes hold of God's promise to him. He trusts this

promise. And then, when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple, Simeon takes hold of Jesus in his arms and speaks the beautiful words which we sing after we receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament.

Thurman and Sunny, you, too, are declared righteous by God for Jesus' sake, because He is your Righteousness. And believing this, you are right with God. And not just the two of you. He whom Mary carries into the temple in our text is, for all of you, your Righteousness.

The world is wrong, dead wrong. We are not right with God because of anything in us, as the world thinks. There is nothing that we have done, to which we can point, and say: "Ah, that makes me right with God – the way I live!" No, it doesn't! And all who think this way will perish.

Jesus alone is our Righteousness. He alone is our Salvation. And He alone is the One we desire. And here is the truth: not one of us desires Him the way we should. We all fail in this. Do we take hold of Him well? Not as well as we should. We are not as devout as we think we are.

But friend, Jesus is devout. He takes hold of you well. Simeon held Jesus in his arms. But the day was approaching when Jesus would take Simeon in His arms and carry him to heaven. Jesus would take hold of Simeon well.

And also you, my friends. We don't take hold so well of Jesus. And so, out of mercy, He took hold well of a cross. You think it was the nails that held Him there? No, it was His love for you. For in taking hold well of the cross, He was taking hold of you. He took hold of your sins. He took hold of the punishment that you and I deserve. Jesus devoted Himself to you by devoting Himself to the sufferings and death of the cross.

This is why He is your Righteousness and your Salvation. And it's why you are not. You cannot pay the price for your sins. But Jesus did. You cannot forgive yourself. But Jesus does. That is the beautiful meaning of your baptism. It means that you are forgiven. It means that salvation is yours in Jesus. This is why Simeon could depart this life in peace. And you, too, when the day comes.

Thurman and Sunny, the waiting is over. You are about to be confirmed. You are about to receive the Holy Sacrament. In your baptism, in this Holy Meal, Jesus takes hold of you well. Will you, for your entire life, take hold well of Him? I hope you do, and even more, I pray you do.

But my hope is not based on how well you will perform throughout your life. My hope is in Jesus, and in His love for you, and for all of you. You will sin, you will fail, you will fall. The two of you, and all of you. And I speak from experience, for I am the same as you. But my God is your God. My Savior is your Savior. And He is devout. He will not fail to take hold well of you. And He loves to forgive sinners like me and you.

And so, Thurman and Sunny, take hold well of Jesus today and always. And be assured always, that if you ever lose your grip on Him, He will never lose His grip on you, because your baptism will never leave you. You will always have your baptism into Christ to return to.

God richly bless the two of you, with all of you, in Christ Jesus, now and always. Amen.