

Luke 2:22-32

God's people go to God's house. It's what they do. We see Elkanah and Hannah doing it in our First Samuel reading. We see Mary and Joseph, and Simeon doing it in our Gospel reading. And not just these. At all times throughout the history of God's people, when there was a house of God to go to, it's where His people would be found.

And they went not emptyhanded. Elkanah and Hannah take with them a three-year-old bull, some flour, and some wine. Mary and Joseph bring a pair of turtledoves. It's what God wanted. These sacrifices they bring at His command.

Aren't you glad we don't have that command today? There'd be birds getting loose and flying around in here, being noisy and making a mess. And just where would we keep the bulls? And when it was time to do the actual sacrificing, some of us might faint or get sick. Going to God's house today is a whole lot different from Bible times. It's cleaner, quieter, and not nearly as smelly.

But you've got to admit that the old way would attract the masses. "Come to our church on Sunday and see live animal sacrifices!" We'd have scores of curious onlookers every week. And also a group of protesters from PETA no doubt.

Now something else we see being brought to the house of God in our readings is children. Elkanah and Hannah bring Samuel, and Mary and Joseph bring Jesus. Both are presented to the Lord.

And that has not changed. God wants children in His house. Maybe not to live there as Samuel did. Yet like Samuel, to be brought into the presence of the Lord there. A child who is faithfully brought to the house of God will never be afraid of God's house, will not feel uncomfortable nor out of place there. It's what God wants. It's what He commands. Leave your animals at home, but bring your children.

But it's not because God loves little ones more than He loves older ones. It's because what children are trained to do, they will continue to do when they get old. Look at Samuel. Brought to God's house when he was little, he loved the Lord and His house all his life. Look at Simeon in our Gospel text. He's surely an old man, and yet he still comes to the house of God. It's the simple truth that God is pleased when older folks, and children, and everyone in between come to His house.

But why? It's not because He wants our animals as sacrifices. He does love our praises, but the angels in heaven sing His praises continually, and sound a whole lot better than us. He uses our offerings, but He doesn't need them. Everything already belongs to Him. Why do God's people go to His house? Why does God want this?

Our answer lies with Simeon. He is the model churchgoer, our example. Simeon comes to God's house for one reason. Not to socialize. Not to show everyone how good he is. He comes because of Jesus; because Simeon believes his Savior will be there. And not just there; there for him.

Simeon comes emptyhanded. He brings nothing except himself. And he sets the pattern in this. Before Simeon, worshippers came with sacrifices. But Simeon comes to hold in his very arms God's own sacrifice for him and for all sinners.

Aren't you Simeon in this way? Maybe you like to socialize here, maybe not. Maybe you enjoy the coffee and cookies, maybe you could do without these. But you are Simeon as you come here because you believe that Jesus is here for you.

Why do you believe this? For the same reason Simeon did. God's promise. He revealed this to Simeon. And He reveals this to you in Holy Scripture. Where His words are purely preached and taught, and His Sacraments are administered according to His own command, there, says Jesus, "*I am with you always.*"

As you come up to the altar, see yourself as Simeon, coming to hold, to receive Jesus. He is the Sacrifice to end all sacrifices. All the animals that were slaughtered before Him were pointing to His cross where Jesus was slaughtered for the sins of all people. And because His blood was shed, God receives you into His presence. He welcomes you into His house as His forgiven people, cleansed of all your sins, for this is what the blood of Jesus does.

And when you leave the altar, you leave as Simeon, even singing his own words, "*Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace.*" Coming to God's house prepares us for death. Simeon was ready to die. And aren't you Simeon also in this way? Even if you'd rather not depart this life in peace today, you are ready whenever that day comes, aren't you? Not because your bucket list is checked off. But because as God gave Jesus to Simeon to depart in peace, so has He given Jesus to you.

Jesus is your bucket list. You are baptized into Him. You receive His body and blood in His own Sacrament, given into death and poured out for you. You see Jesus, and Him alone, as your salvation. Your sins are forgiven. All this is by God's gracious work in Jesus Christ for you and in you.

Of all the people of the world, you are truly blessed. Most do not go to God's house to receive and hold Jesus like Simeon. Most do not have the assurance that Simeon had. But you do, by God's grace. You know, my friend, that you have a God who forgives you; who gathers you into His house to receive your Savior, and who promises to embrace you in death when that day comes so that you depart in peace. Amen.