

Sermon for Sunday 30th January 2022 – Luke 2: 22-40 & 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13 – Rev Lin Vawer

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable in your sight as we look to know you better and love you more, Lord our Saviour and friend. Amen

Are we nearly there yet? I wonder how many parents, have been faced with this question as you set out on a visit? Taking reception children out for a visit is lovely. Own clothes, dressed for all weathers, lunch boxes packed to the brim by anxious parents no sooner has the engine started, the wheels made it to the first corner than the cry goes up "Are we nearly there yet?". The important part of the journey is getting there, eating your lunch and coming home. Forget the educational extravaganza you might have planned.

We have prepared for the Christ child during advent, we have celebrated his birth and remind ourselves of the life and ministry to come. We look forward to the time when all will be made clear to us, are we tempted to say "Are we nearly there yet?". As we come towards the end of the epiphany season the child in the crib is not for packing away and getting out again in a year's time. Today we hear how God's salvation is made known to two faithful servants, Simeon and Anna. Today is the time to consider all that Jesus means to us and the difference he makes in our lives. Now is the time not to pack him away but to carry him out in our everyday lives.

Staying close to Jesus

Simeon was righteous and devout. He was looking and longing for Israel to be made right with God. He stayed faithful and hopeful, and **the spirit rested on him**. He was unique in that he had been promised that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. And he never gave up hope. I wonder if he ever felt like saying "Are we nearly there yet?"

It is no coincidence that Simeon just happens to be in the Temple when the young parents walk in holding their precious bundle. He is "**Moved by the spirit**" to be there at that particular time and in taking the child and blessing him he knows that for him, the waiting is over. He has arrived. In the presence of Jesus he has become fully who he has been called to be and knows himself ready for his death. He is at peace. He has witnessed God's salvation in ways both unexpected and the very ordinary and finds himself holding heaven in his hands. Simeon praises God.

We find ourselves more fully when we allow ourselves that close relationship with Jesus – when we hold onto Jesus and allow the image of God within us to grow and develop. How do we do it? through faithful prayer and worship, reading God's word and engaging with God's world – leaving the glitter and tinsel of Christmas behind and taking the Christ child with us into the ordinary everyday stuff of our lives. Every time we meet at the Lord's table we hold Jesus in our hands – we join with heaven- we are made complete, and our daily lives are fed and nourished. We are enabled to stay faithful and hopeful.

Staying close to One another

and we don't do it alone. Through our baptism we are one with Christ and one with each other, part of the body of Christ. This of course brings responsibility. We are called to work together so that the body of Christ on earth – the church – continues the work of God in the world. We were reminded last week of the important conversations that are taking place at the moment around racial justice and the inclusion of all our brothers and sisters in Christ. We too have a voice in those conversations. We too are part of the revolution that Phil reminded us started with Jesus and still continues.

Every member of Christ's body are called and gifted to play a part in God's kingdom. Like Simeon, and Anna, it's never too late to have a fresh encounter with Jesus that energises our faith and leads to new ways of serving and witnessing, to meet with the living Lord and have our hope and faith reignited.

At the moment days are often dark, cold and wet with the odd spurts of light – and it can feel like it spills every bit of us. But I wonder if we grab hold of those occasional spurts of light, be energised by the spirit of God and ask ourselves what we are being called to do, to say, to encourage that will keep the fire of faith and hope alive in ourselves and each in other. What gifts are we being asked to use?

However long we have been coming to church, Jesus is calling us to make a difference. One of the things that this pandemic has taught us is that it is always possible to do new things, do old things differently, learn new skills, be creative as we reach out to serve others. If you have a good idea, a gift, a skill then offer it. God does amazing things with our gifts to grow his kingdom.

Close to our Community.

Hearing this reading, feeling the excitement of Simeon and Anna, it is easy to bypass the young couple, Mary and Joseph. And yet we have seen their **faithfulness** in their yes to God and each other. Their **faithfulness** as they "do the right thing" and bring this babe to fulfil the rites of purification. It a poignant and moving picture. What would their hope be. Perhaps for Simeon to say some polite and complimentary things about the baby. Maybe Give him a cuddle and pull a few funny faces. But there is no small talk in Simeon's prophecy – Jesus is destined to do great things. But there would be no neutral ground no sitting on the fence, He will be totally accepted or rejected, he is the Messiah and saviour of many but to fulfil his calling he must make enemies as well as friends and he will be publicly opposed to a point where not even his own mother will not remain unscathed. And despite it all "**they marvel about what is said**" - that is some faith.

It is the picture of the revolution that Jesus will start and that we will become party to. Ultimately, we are part of Jesus destiny to make Gods unconditional love for all creation known. There is no neutral ground. People need to hear that they are loved and cherished and saved by God their creator. The church is not an end in itself but a means by which God's glory is revealed in the world, so we must turn and face outwards, looking beyond the walls toward the world that God loves so passionately.

Faithful Anna, in the temple for years after the death of her husband. Days spent worshipping and fasting and praying. As Simeon holds Jesus, so Anna praises God and begins to speak about Jesus to everyone. Imagine her rushing around in her excitement at what she has seen. Like Simeon she has stayed faithful and hopeful and now she is turning outwards and telling everyone she meets about Jesus.

Being like Anna means being an ambassador of Jesus – wherever we are, in the ordinary mundane stuff of our lives speaking of Jesus through what we do and say, who we are. We are called to be countercultural at times – doing things rather differently from the way others do them. Showing in words and deeds the difference being close to Jesus makes. Going the extra mile for those we live among.

The very famous and well-loved from Corinthians is often referred to as a hymn of love but it is regularly lifted out of context because the beauty of the language obscures the practical force of the words. Written to a conflicted congregation, in dispute about spiritual gifts Paul writes to address their misunderstandings.

Paul says – it doesn't matter how gifted you are, what you can do or how much noise you make about your faith, it's the love that you show that makes the difference. Not sentimental, romantic love but tough, gracious, long-lasting love – which is God given and Christ like.

gifts and sacrifice mean nothing to the doer if they are not underpinned by love. - **Love is essential**
love is not abstract - it acts. Expressed in down to earth contexts, in situations of stress and conflict it is anything but romantic! **Love is practical**
love is it is enduring and when pursued above everything it makes our spiritual gifts a positive force for change. **Love is permanent**

Are we nearly there yet – no not yet but until we are let's resolve to -

Leave Jesus out of the crib – allow him to come close to us, hold him in our arms and in our hearts and let him do his best work yet in us.

Amen