

1st Sunday of Christmas – December 27, 2020

Grace Lutheran Champaign – Pastor Janet Lepp, preacher

To See and be Seen – Luke 2:22-40

Let us pray:

O Lord... YOU are calling us to listen.

For you have a lot to say.

So much to say, in fact,

That what you had to say could not be restricted to words or confined to paper.

What you had to communicate to us is so important and so loving

That you had to say it in person.

“The Word became flesh; - a human being – to tell us – to SHOW us your LOVE.

Open our ears... to listen to you and your message of LOVE.

Open our eyes... to see your love for us – and for the world. Amen

On this Sunday after Christmas I’m intrigued by what people see when they look at each other.

What triggered my pondering is the Bible passage I just read from Luke.

And my thoughts take me to thinking about how hard it is to see each other during these days of isolation – except on a screen – or behind masks at a distance – or written somewhere for us to read.

Let me begin by saying that I’m thankful for the author of the Gospel of Luke because he is such an amazing storyteller and it is his writings that have the ability to help us see more clearly who Jesus is – and to see more clearly what that means for us and for our world.

So, imagine with me that we are watching the scenes unfold as Joseph and Mary approach the Temple.

Word on the street has it that they have traveled the 6 miles from Bethlehem that day with their baby.

The Temple was believed to be the place where God’s presence was manifested more than anywhere else, so they were coming to the Temple to have their Son presented to the Lord God, according to the Law.

In our mind’s eye, we watch as they purchase a pair of young doves in the outer court of the Temple.

We see that they must be poor, because had they been rich they would have been able to purchase a lamb to offer for the mandatory sacrifice. But instead, they hold tightly to two doves as they move beyond the gates.

We watch as they meet with the Priest for the baby to be circumcised, thereby dedicating their Firstborn Son to the Lord. They name their baby Jesus, which means Savior. Joseph claims an angel in a vision gave the unborn baby his name months back. Then, before they left, Mary went through the required purification rite.

Poor – far from home – struggling to do their best – we see this young family is following the Law carefully.

Just as they are leaving to make the long journey to their home in Nazareth – we see Simeon, who lives in Jerusalem. He often spends time at the Temple. The Holy Spirit had prodded him to go to the Temple that day to see this baby; the promised Messiah. Simeon looks upon Jesus and his heart sings out for joy in thanksgiving to God: ***For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.***

In this baby Jesus, Simeon sees that the Lord God has honored God’s promises which were made in the days of old and told by the prophets. In Jesus, Simeon sees God’s presence as a light shining in the darkness showing Israel and all the nations the way of salvation.

Now, the young family turns to leave again. That’s when Anna comes hustling quickly to them.

She is a prophet who has been living in the Temple. When Anna looked at Jesus she also began to praise God and to speak about this child as the one God had promised to bring redemption of Jerusalem.

Both Simeon and Anna saw God’s faithfulness to them, to Israel, and to all nations when they looked on Jesus.

Life had not easy for the people of Israel in those days when Augustus was Roman Emperor and Quirinius was Governor over Syria. They had experienced oppression and hardships. But... **God had seen them!** And had heard their fervent prayers and the prayers of the nation being answered through this child, Jesus.

Throughout this coming year we will continue hearing stories from the Gospel of Luke during our worship times. The stories will tell us about Jesus and help us see what his presence in the world means for the people. Luke will show us people who were wondering if they were going to drown in the chaos around them. And then we will see Jesus going to them in compassion and calming the stormy waters that threaten life.

Luke will describe people who are hungry – by the thousands. Then we will see Jesus going to them in compassion and feeding their hunger.

We will see fatigued fishermen who had worked all night with nothing to show for it. And then we will see Jesus going to them in compassion and coaching them into fishing a new way, for something new.

We will see Jesus going compassionately to people who suffer from leprosy, paralysis, demons, illness, grief.

We will even see Jesus going to leaders who are oppressing people and taking advantage of them. Then we will see Jesus filled with anger and demanding justice!

And when Jesus was on the cross, do you remember how he looked upon those who were crucifying him?

Even in his suffering Jesus saw them, loved them, offered them forgiveness, and a new way of living.

And even though these stories of chaos and hunger, fatigue and suffering are about people those many years ago – aren't these also stories that sound familiar to us in our world in our lives? When I think about Jesus born to us, I marvel at God's gift to the world of becoming one of us and seeing us for who we are.

And I wonder; if 'being seen' is such a powerful gift from God wouldn't it make sense that WE would strive to be intentional about seeing others?

In Rob Bell's latest book "Everything is Spiritual, he writes:

At some subterranean level of the heart, what we all want is for another human to say, I see you.

This is one of the great gifts we give each other.

We notice.

We acknowledge.

We see.

That one line – I see you – whether spoken or simply experience,

That one line holds so much,

Explains so much...

Think of how much violence in our world comes from the hands of those who have never felt seen.

When there aren't jobs or education or options or basics like food and water and health care – and no one seems to care – of course people get angry.

It becomes political and societal and structural,

But it often starts deeply personal:

*No one sees. The injustice, the oppression, the exploitation
– and those who could stop it didn't see.*

Or, they saw, and they looked away.

As Christians – we rejoice that God sees us and comes to us with compassion through Jesus Christ.

It is through the eyes of Jesus that we are able to begin to see others, even those who we find hard to see or choose to ignore or just frankly don't like or see as worthy of our time and care.

On this day we give thanks for the witness given by Simeon and Anna on the day they saw Jesus.

Their witness to the world is that Jesus is God's living presence come into the world and that he has come to redeem the people– he has come to save the nations.

The Christmas story we hear each year – again and again – is that Jesus is the living Word of God– who has come in person – to TELL us – and to SHOW us God's message intended for all people.

The message he tells – and shows throughout his entire life – is to love each other as God loves us.

And to love each other is to see our world through the eyes of Jesus – filled with compassion and with hope for a future filled with justice and peace and joy and new life intended for all people.

Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift! Amen.