

# **Sermon Text for December 20, 2015**

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*Micah 5:2-5a, Luke 2:25-35*

Well, Advent in Luke, that's been our theme these past four weeks. So...It's time to review who Christ is. What we have learned about Christ during these four weeks of Advent is that first Christ is our hope and that we can expect that good things even better things are right around the corner. Christ is our way and that way is the way of humility. Christ is our joy which means we are able to celebrate Christ in our life regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Today we learn that Christ is our peace.

Simeon in Luke chapter 2 is really the only person who seems to grasp the mysterious nature of what God has set in motion with the birth of Jesus. We have Mary and Joseph who are confused, the disciples later on get bits and pieces of the understanding but never really get the full picture, except maybe Thomas who calls Jesus My Lord and My God. Basically Simeon is the first one in the Bible who really gets it. He really understands. When he does understand he calls out to God and declares that he is now at peace, the world could fall in around him or he could even die, and it wouldn't matter because he was at peace.

I've had the opportunity to speak to a number of people who have had near death experiences and when they come out of it they inevitably use one word to describe that experience. Peace. They were at peace because they knew that someone was in charge, was in control out there and they didn't have to worry about anything any longer. We don't need to have near death experiences to have peace and to realize that someone is in charge out there. In fact we find Simeon in our Scripture today who finds peace because after years of searching he finally finds Christ. Jesus Christ was the source of his peace because he realized that through Christ he could rest assured because he was in control.

Luke tells us that the holy family is in Jerusalem to do for Jesus what was customary under the law. There should be no doubt that Jesus was born into a very religious family. They followed the Jewish laws. One of the laws is the redemption rite of the firstborn son which Jesus was. The first born son was considered belonging to God until he was brought to the temple and literally bought back by the parents by them paying a temple tax. Remember in the Old Testament when Samuel is born and his mother goes to the temple and doesn't redeem him, doesn't buy him back because she

had promised that if she had a son he would belong to God. In this Scripture Mary and Joseph go to Jerusalem to redeem Jesus.

While Jesus is being brought in for this religious rite of redemption, some old guy who used to hang around the temple a lot, takes him from his parents and holds him up and claims him as the salvation for all humankind. It would almost be like during a baptism in this church someone coming from the pews and taking the child and calling him the Savior. The Scripture states that Mary and Joseph were confused. REALLY! No kidding. Wouldn't you be if you were the parents? This man, Simeon, apparently had spent his whole life waiting for the Christ, the Messiah. Some of us have a hard time waiting for four weeks for Christmas but this man had waited his whole life knowing that God would act because God had promised him that he would act. You know, it is no fun waiting, especially if you're waiting for God to do something and time after time, it seems as if he is doing nothing. Maybe Simeon, child after child, was getting tired, but he certainly never gave up. He spent his whole life searching for the Messiah. What a testimony because When God does act it makes the wait worthwhile.

Finally God speaks to Simeon and says go, go to the temple again today, the one is coming. The one was Jesus, and after a life of searching and looking in all the wrong directions the result is his discovery of the Christ. The immediate result once he discovers Christ is peace. Immediate, automatic, unquestionable peace. He has to look no longer. He can call off the search party. He prays to God and states that God could take him now because he had found peace, he had found Jesus Christ.

This time of year can be the most joyful time of year as we mentioned last week. Families are traditionally together and the children love it which seems to spill out onto the adults as well. But it can also be the time of year that is the most hectic and disturbing. The frenetic searches for presents, the frantic baking, the relatives that may not be your favorite coming over. All of this can drown out this ideal of Christ being our peace for Advent, the time before Christmas. Some people spend their whole lives frantically searching for something or someone to guide them and never end up looking in the right place. On that day Jesus was presented in the temple, in the church, what a great place to look for the Savior, and on that day Simeon was able to stop looking. Today we too, in this church can stop looking and enjoy the peace of Christ that comes when we find him.

What is it about our Savior, the child Jesus, that provides us with peace? Our first Scripture for this morning Micah, gives us an answer. The prophet states something that we have heard before but in a completely different context, look at vs. 4-5a. Micah states that the Messiah will bring about peace because: he shall be great to the ends of the earth. The people will be at peace because they are assured of their security because of the strength of the Lord. The Savior, our Lord, shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, the Scripture states. Peace through strength. We will have peace because we can rely upon the strength of the Lord. We are used to hearing peace through strength in the nuclear arms race, or against ISIS, or in shutting our borders down for refugees and immigrants, but not in relationship to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But this is exactly where we can find our peace and why we can find our peace in Christ. It is because we are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our Lord, even as a baby was strong enough to hold onto us and keep us at peace because he is the one for whom we have been waiting to liberate us from our sin. Simeon was at peace because when he saw and met baby Jesus, the one he had been waiting and looking for his whole life, he knew that a ruler was finally in place.

Peace for Simeon was not the absence of war but rather the presence of one who could bring reconciliation. Peace for Simeon was not the absence of strife but rather the presence of one who was love. Peace for Simeon was not the absence of enemies but rather the presence of one who could love his enemies. Christ is our peace not because he rules with violence but because he rules with the strength of God's love. We can have peace because in Christ we have one who can take our expectations, our goals, our dreams, and look at us and tell us, the time has come, I have arrived in your life, be at peace. This is the message that we receive from Simeon in Luke, and the prophet Micah that when Christ came into the world he would provide peace to those who would accept him because we would know that he was in charge.

But what if we don't know that he is in charge. Simeon has something to say about that as well. When Mary and Joseph don't seem to get it in this passage Simeon tells them that Jesus will be responsible for the rising and falling of many. This Christ child that he had been waiting for and that we await now with anticipation will throw all who come into contact with him, like Simeon and you and me today, into a crisis of

decision and a time of unrest. Yes, Christ is our peace if we allow him to rule and govern our lives. But we can also choose not to have that peace and refuse to recognize Christ as ruler. We do have that choice. It is in this decision where we will see the rising and the falling of many that Simeon talked about. It is in this decision where actual life and death will result. Jesus precipitates and causes the centrally important movement of one's life toward or away from God. He is the harbinger of peace, the one who hints at its coming, but it will only come if you receive him completely as Lord of your life. The peace of Christ is only peace if we accept that peace, otherwise it is only turbulence.

This is why Simeon rejoices because he recognized the peace that this child, the Messiah would bring. But he also realized the woe and turmoil that he would bring to those who didn't receive him. GK Chesterton once prayed: "Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our redeemer so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our judge." When we are at peace then we are at peace with Christ who is both our redeemer and judge.

There is a saying that whenever a light is turned on it inevitably creates shadows. When the peace of Christ comes upon someone it can cast shadows upon those around him. I remember the story of a family who had gathered together on Christmas day. They had a troubled son among a host of nearly perfect children. But one day this son found Christ and the family wasn't sure how to deal with it. It was Christmas and the family was together as they were every year. It came to pass out the presents and this boy got up, went into the kitchen, grabbed a towel and a pitcher of water and began washing the feet of his family members. The family was very uncomfortable, after all that would be more appropriate for Easter, it is a time of handing out presents. But then slowly the youngest sibling grabbed a towel and began washing feet and before they knew it everyone was on their hands and knees with their shoes off. The peace of Christ allows us to be strong in the Lord and to do things that normally we would be too afraid and self-conscious to do for the glory of God.

We all want to be at peace but we don't all want to admit that peace can only come from Christ. Simeon knew that he could rest in peace after a lifetime of waiting and preparing because he had met the Christ. Only if we allow Christ to rule in us, in his strength, can we have the peace of Christ. Let us wait for and anticipate the coming of this child who provides through his strength our peace. Amen.