

Sermon for the Presentation of Our Lord
St. Luke/San Lucas 2 February 2025
Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

Lord, you now have set your servant free

To go in peace as you have promised;

For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,

Whom you have prepared for all the world to see;

A Light to enlighten the nations,

And the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.¹

Please be seated.

Known as the Nunc Dimittis, this poem is based on our Gospel passage today, taken from the words proclaimed by the righteous Simeon when he held the baby Jesus at the temple. They are one of the Canticles in our Book of Common Prayer, and those of you who participate in the daily office are probably familiar with them, as they regularly occur in our Morning and Evening Prayer, and in our Compline services. They have been proclaimed and sung, preached and prayed, for centuries. And, I have found myself reflecting on these words often over the last few weeks, because, speaking frankly, I need to see this light, I

¹ The Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis), BCP, p. 93

need reassurance of this salvation. I am searching for what Simeon received, what he, and we, are promised—peace.

Today, we celebrate the Presentation of Our Lord, when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple for his blessing. We also celebrate the day of the blessing of the candles, Candelaria, Candelmas, the day in which we give thanks for the Light, the wisdom and knowledge, that God, through Jesus, brought into the world, a Light, a salvation, for all the world to see. A Light to bring wisdom, understanding, to enlighten all the nations. A Light that leads us to that promised peace.

And, as we look at the world around us today, we could certainly do with a bit of that light, with some of that knowledge and understanding, with some of that enlightenment, to guide us through these challenging times, these dark days. A Light that can bring peace.

I think we all know what that Light shows us, what we are supposed to do. After all, Jesus was pretty clear in his teachings. We are supposed to care for the poor, feed the hungry, comfort the dying. We are supposed to show compassion, mercy, to forgive. We are supposed to welcome the stranger, love our neighbor. Love each other. Love God.

We are supposed to cast off fear, to have faith, to live in faith, to step out in faith, to be supremely and utterly confident that, when we do what God has called us to do, we will be at peace. God has promised us that.

And yet, and yet. We are human. And we have doubts. We have fears. Sometimes, even though we can see the light, and the circle of brightness around it, sometimes we find ourselves standing just outside the light, in the shadows, looking in, unable to take that last step out of the comforting darkness.

In the past few days, my various feeds have been blowing up with commentary. First, there were the reactions to Bishop Budde's sermon at the National Cathedral. So many friends and former colleagues from a variety of countries and faith traditions have written, commenting on her courage, her poise, her ability to speak truth in the face of power. That the response to fear is compassion, is mercy, is living out our faith. There were a number of self-congratulatory messages from Episcopalians around the world, see, this is who we are. Welcoming, grace-filled, courageous. For many of us, this was a real mountain-top experience, a moment when we saw God at work in the world.

But it wasn't a mountain-top experience for all. I have also heard other voices, voices of concern. And I'm not speaking here about the blatant abuse and vitriol of those who have oppose Bishop Budde's message, but rather those practicing, faithful Christians, including Episcopalians, who are saying that maybe this wasn't the moment to poke the bear. Those that are concerned about the consequences, the safety, of Bishop Budde, of the Episcopal church, of those who come to us for services.

And on Friday, we received a message from the national office of the Episcopal Church informing us that, due to the cut-off of federal funds for refugee and migration programs, the Episcopal Migration Ministry has informed 22 employees that their jobs will be ending on February 14. That they will have a severance package and outplacement services, and that the Episcopal Migration Ministry will wind down those programs. The letter says that we are grieving the loss of this refugee resettlement ministry. Yes, it goes on to say that we still stand with migrants. But we won't be providing services to them in the same way.

Now, with the sudden and complete loss of funding, hard decisions have to be made, and I'm sure there are very thoughtful, dedicated individuals who took these steps prayerfully. That said, for many of us, this is a low moment, a stepping away at a time when the needs are so great.

And as I was considering these two events, one so exhilarating, the other so heartbreaking, my thoughts turned to Peter. I think one of the reasons I've always loved the Bible stories of Peter is that he is just so human. Remember when he was in the boat out on the lake, and he saw Jesus walking on the water toward them. And Peter got so excited, he was so filled with faith, he just jumped out of the boat and started running across the water to Jesus! But then what happened? He looked around, realized that that water was really, really deep, that he was really, really far from shore, and all those doubts, all that fear, began to seep in, and Peter started to sink. And what happened next, Jesus reached out his hand, pulled Peter up. Jesus pulled him up and helped him climb into the boat.

Now, you would think that, after that, Peter would be filled with faith, that he would never doubt again. But we humans don't work like that. After Jesus' arrest, when Peter was outside, standing by the fire, and was questioned, aren't you from Galilee? Aren't you one of the guys with Jesus? Peter denied it. I don't know what you're talking about. Never met the guy. In that moment, faced with very real threats, Peter fell apart. Fear took over.

And you'd think that, after two particularly public and large failings, that Jesus would have said to Peter, thanks for your service, but I just don't think you're cut out for this. Maybe you should go home and try fishing again. But Jesus didn't. Jesus showed compassion. Jesus extended mercy. Jesus loved. And we know that Peter was among those to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection. That Jesus continued to love, to encourage, to correct and guide, but also to uphold, Peter.

Peter went on to become a founding member of the new church in Jerusalem. Peter spoke out on Pentecost. Peter probably still had moments of doubt and fear, but Peter grew into his faith. And Peter ultimately gave his life for his beliefs. Jesus didn't give up on Peter when he was fearful, when he lacked faith. Jesus corrected, encouraged, and loved him.

Right now, we are going through a lot. There are challenges in the world around us, the world outside these doors, with lots of changes coming at us fast and we're all trying to figure out how to respond. Here at St. Luke/San Lucas, we are entering a new phase in our

life as a church, with a new Priest in Charge, and a task of drawing up a new strategic plan, of figuring out who and what we are going to be and do for the next few years. And I know that many of us are facing challenges in our own lives, housing, jobs, money, health, family.

It can be overwhelming, and the world can seem very dark. And we will, individually and collectively, be facing the question, over and over again, are we going to be Peter, jumping out of the boat and running across the water, or are we going to be Peter, sinking into the depths? Are we going to be Peter, panicking, or Peter, reaching out his hand to Jesus, being pulled up and into safety once again? Are we going to fall back into fear, or are we going to step forward in faith? Are we going to stay in the dark, or are we going to move into the light?

What I want us all to leave here today with is this: we may be courageous. We may be filled with doubts. We may step forward. We may hold back. Regardless, we are not alone as we go through these challenges. The Light is here, before us, guiding our way. Our community is here. Our church is here. And, above all, God is here. Loving us, encouraging us, picking us up when we fall, because we all fall, and bringing us that promised peace. Amen.