

“A PATTERN FAR BETTER”
A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE
(2:22-40) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC
ON DECEMBER 27, 2020-----
(THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS)

SADLY----WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE OFTEN
YOUNG CHILDREN ARE OVERLOOKED, YOUNGER
ADULTS FEEL OVERWHELMED, AND OLDER
ADULTS HAVE NO USEFUL PLACE. IT’S A WORLD
THAT’S OUT OF JOINT.

TODAY WE HAVE REASON TO REJOICE,
HOWEVER. FOR TODAY IS SET BEFORE US
ANOTHER PATTERN, A FAR BETTER ONE, AND A
PATTERN THAT WE CAN LIVE OUT AND
PROMOTE,

**FOR IN IT OLDER ADULTS, YOUNGER ADULTS,
AND CHILDREN ALL HAVE AN HONORED AND
SPECIAL PLACE.**

**TODAY WE CELEBRATE THE PRESENTATION OF
JESUS IN THE TEMPLE. LUKE'S GOSPEL
RECOUNTS THAT FORTY DAYS AFTER HIS BIRTH,
JESUS IS TAKEN TO THE TEMPLE BY MARY AND
JOSEPH. THIS IS THE EXPECTED THING FOR
THEM TO DO. IT IS THE CUSTOM OF GOD'S
PEOPLE IN THAT TIME AND PLACE.**

FORTY DAYS AFTER HER CHILD'S BIRTH, MARY CAN AGAIN WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE. HER RITUAL CLEANSING CALLS FOR THE SACRIFICE OF A LAMB AND A PIGEON, BUT BECAUSE SHE AND JOSEPH ARE VERY POOR, THEY OFFER INSTEAD A PAIR OF PIGEONS, THE ACCEPTED SUBSTITUTE THAT THE POOR CAN MAKE IN PLACE OF A MORE EXPENSIVE OFFERING.

IT'S ALSO TIME TO CONSECRATE THIS FIRST-BORN SON TO THE LORD. THIS RECALLS HOW THE LORD DELIVERED ISRAEL FROM EGYPT, AND HOW ISRAEL WAS REDEEMED FROM HER BONDAGE.

**YOU REMEMBER THE STORY I AM SURE -----
WHEN THE ANGEL OF DEATH TOOK EGYPT'S
FIRST-BORN SONS, THE FIRST-BORN SONS OF
ISRAEL WERE SPARED.**

**IT'S NOT AS THOUGH THIS YOUNG FAMILY HAS
THE VAST TEMPLE COMPLEX TO THEMSELVES.**

**THIS HOUSE OF THE LORD AT THE CENTER OF
JERUSALEM IS SWARMING WITH ACTIVITY.**

**NUMEROUS PEOPLE ARE THERE TO WORSHIP
THE LORD, TO FULFILL THEIR RELIGIOUS
OBLIGATIONS. THE LITTLE THREESOME SEEMS
TO BE HARDLY NOTICED AMONG THE PRESS OF
HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE.**

**AFTER ALL, THERE ARE MANY NEW BABIES
BROUGHT TO THE TEMPLE THIS DAY.**

**BUT THE YOUNG COUPLE AND THEIR CHILD ARE
NOTICED BY TWO PEOPLE. THE FIRST OF THEM
IS SIMEON. SOMEHOW HE FELT DRAWN TO GO
TO THE TEMPLE THAT DAY. IN ITSELF, THIS IS
NOT SURPRISING. HE IS A DEVOUT MAN WHO
OFTEN VISITS THE TEMPLE. INDEED, THOUGH HE
HAS NEVER TOLD ANYONE, HE FIRMLY BELIEVES
THAT BEFORE HE DIES, GOD WILL GRANT HIM
THE PRIVILEGE OF LAYING EYES ON GOD'S OWN
MESSIAH. PERHAPS THIS WILL BE THE DAY.**

**SIMEON WALKS THROUGH THE MILLING
CROWDS. HE SEES A COUPLE WITH THEIR CHILD
WHO LOOK NO DIFFERENT THAN THE PEOPLE
AROUND THEM. YET WHAT HE HEARS INSIDE
HIMSELF IS UNMISTAKABLE. THESE ARE THE
ONES, AND THEIR BABY IS THE MESSIAH!**

**SIMEON DOESN'T KNOW WHETHER TO CRY OR
LAUGH. HE'S NOT SURE WHETHER HE'S
GRATEFUL TO GOD OR ANGRY. THE MESSIAH IS
A BABY?**

SIMEON HAD ALWAYS PICTURED HIM DIFFERENTLY, AS A STRONG MAN DRESSED IN ARMOR, OR SOME SUPERHUMAN FIGURE RADIATING LIGHT. BUT A BABY? THIS BABY STARTS WIGGLING IN HIS MOTHER'S ARMS. SOMETHING WELLS UP INSIDE SIMEON. IT COMES OUT: A PRAYER TO GOD, A FLOOD OF WORDS, A SONG SUNG TO A UNKNOWN MELODY. NOW SIMEON IS AN OLD MAN, SLOW, CAUTIOUS, REVERENT, CAREFUL. YET RIGHT THERE IN THE TEMPLE, HIGH ON THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE SINGS OUT IN A LOUD VOICE, LIKE SOME TEENAGER IN THE FIRST THROES OF LOVE:

***“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.”***

THE YOUNG HUSBAND AND WIFE LOOK AT HIM WITH PERPLEXED EXPRESSIONS. YOU'D THINK BY NOW, WITH ALL THE STRANGE THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED RECENTLY IN THEIR LIVES, THEY WOULD HAVE BECOME INCAPABLE OF SURPRISE. BUT THE OLD MAN'S SONG LEAVES THEM SPEECHLESS.

AS THEY STAND SILENT, THE OLD MAN SPEAKS TO THEM THE WORDS OF A BLESSING, TAKES THE BABY IN HIS ARMS, AND ADDRESSES THE WOMAN. "BEHOLD, THIS CHILD IS SET FOR THE FALLING AND THE RISING OF MANY IN ISRAEL, AND FOR A SIGN WHICH IS SPOKEN AGAINST.

YES, A SWORD WILL PIERCE THROUGH YOUR OWN SOUL.”

HOW MUCH EASIER, MARY AND JOSEPH BOTH THINK, WOULD IT BE IF THIS OLD MAN SIMPLY SAID SOMETHING CONVENTIONAL, SUCH AS “WHAT A BEAUTIFUL BABY!” MARY FEELS THAT SWORD CUTTING HER ALREADY.

THEN AN OLD WOMAN COMES UP, THE TALKATIVE SORT. SHE BEGINS TO PRAISE GOD ALOUD, HER ANCIENT FACE CRINKLED IN A SMILE OF DELIGHT. SHE STRIKES UP CONVERSATIONS WITH PERFECT STRANGERS NEARBY IN THAT CURIOUS WAY OLD LADIES HAVE OF DOING SO.

SHE BRAGS ABOUT THIS BABY AS THOUGH HE WERE HER OWN GRANDCHILD. THOUGH HER GLASSES ARE TRIFOCALS, SHE SEES SOMETHING SPECIAL: THIS CHILD WILL BE THE START OF A NEW EXODUS, A FRESH REDEMPTION FOR GOD'S CAPTIVE PEOPLE.

SOME IN THE CROWD RECOGNIZE HER. SHE'S ANNA, THE DAUGHTER OF PHANUEL, AND SHE IS NOW EIGHTY-FOUR YEARS OLD. SHE'S BEEN A WIDOW LONGER THAN MOST OF THEM HAVE BEEN ALIVE. AND PIOUS! LIVES AT THE TEMPLE, PRAYS ALL THE TIME, FASTS MORE THAN SHE EATS.

AND NOW THE OLD GIRL IS DANCING A JIG OVER
A BABY SOME COUPLE BROUGHT IN!

THE SCENE CLOSSES WITH TWO YOUNG PARENTS
WITH CONFUSED FACES LEAVING THE TEMPLE
QUICKLY. THEIR BABY'S FALLEN ASLEEP
AGAIN, BUT THEY ARE RATTLED, ASTOUNDED AT
WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM.

THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS OF THEIR LIVES
BACK HOME AT NAZARETH WILL BE QUIET AND
UNEVENTFUL AS THEY DELIGHT IN THEIR
CHILD'S GROWTH. BUT THEY WILL NEVER
FORGET THAT DAY IN JERUSALEM WHEN THEY
MET ANNA AND SIMEON. AND NEITHER SHOULD
WE.

I SAID THAT THIS STORY OFFERS US A PATTERN,
ONE FOR US TO LIVE OUT AND PROMOTE. THE
STRANGE SCENE IN THE TEMPLE BRINGS
TOGETHER A BABY, A YOUNG COUPLE, AND A
PAIR OF OLD PEOPLE.

IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE YOUNGER ADULTS
ARE NOT CONSTANTLY OVERWHELMED BY THE
DUTIES OF DAILY EXISTENCE, BUT GO TO
WORSHIP, WHERE THEY ARE SURPRISED AND
TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S LOVING INTENTIONS
FOR THEM.

**IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE OLDER ADULTS FIND
PURPOSE AND DIRECTION, WHERE THEY LISTEN
FOR SOME WORD TO SPEAK TO THE NEXT
GENERATION, AND ANTICIPATE GOD CALLING
THEM HOME SOME DAY.**

**IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE EACH AND EVERY
CHILD IS WELCOMED AND TREATED AS
IMPORTANT IN GOD'S PLAN, REGARDED AS A
PRECIOUS REVELATION, A SIGN THAT GOD
REMEMBERS US FOR GOOD.**

YOU AND I LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE OFTEN
CHILDREN ARE OVERLOOKED, YOUNGER
ADULTS FEEL OVERWHELMED, AND OLDER
ADULTS HAVE NO USEFUL PLACE. IT'S A WORLD
THAT'S OUT OF JOINT.

BUT TODAY A YOUNG COUPLE BRING THEIR
BABY TO JERUSALEM, AND IN THE TEMPLE MEET
AN OLD WOMAN AND AN OLD MAN. TODAY
THERE UNFOLDS PART OF THE STORY OF
REDEMPTION.

WE ARE GIVEN A PATTERN WE CAN LIVE OUT
AND PROMOTE WHERE OLDER ADULTS,
YOUNGER ADULTS, AND CHILDREN ALL HAVE AN
HONORED AND SPECIAL PLACE.

AND THROUGH THE STORY AND THE
SACRAMENT THE STRENGTH IS AVAILABLE TO
US TO MAKE THAT PATTERN COME TRUE HERE
IN THE WORLD WHERE WE LIVE.

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN!!!