

## Luke 2:22-35

• **21** After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. **22** When the day came for the purification according to the law of Moses, they brought the baby up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, **23** as it is written in the law of the Lord: *Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to God.* **24** And they offered a sacrifice as ordered in the law of the Lord: *a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*

**25** There lived in Jerusalem at this time a very upright and devout man named Simeon; the Holy Spirit was in him. He looked forward to the time when the Lord would comfort Israel, **26** and he had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah of the Lord. **27** So he was led into the Temple by the Holy Spirit at the time the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law.

**28** Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed God, saying,  
**29** "Now, O Lord, you can dismiss  
your servant in peace,  
for you have fulfilled your word  
**30** and my eyes have seen your salvation,  
**31** which you display for all the people to see.  
**32** Here is the light you will reveal to the nations  
and the glory of your people Israel."

**33** His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about the child. **34** Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed **35** so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

One of the greatest gifts of my Seminary experience was the year-long internship that I did in Greenville, NC. In particular, I was very blessed to work with my mentor there, Pastor Paul Lang. He and his wife were both trained musicians. After getting his undergraduate degree in music, Paul felt called to ministry, went to Columbia Seminary, and music has continued to play an important role in his ministry as well as his own devotional practice.

Paul introduced me to the traditional monastic practice of praying the hours, seven brief worship services observed on a daily basis at specific times. Each service included a scripture reading, a psalm to chant, prayers, and some scriptural passages set to music. Part of our reading today, my favorite part, is called the Song of Simeon, and Paul wrote a setting for these words that was used regularly at vespers – the last service of the day. The Song of Simeon is a dismissal in peace, and a reminder to worshippers that the day is ending that has been given by God. There are words of God's purpose, and there is a gift in resting in the knowledge that God's promises are fulfilled.

I experienced the gift of daily worship with Paul. It is amazing to me what a difference it made for me to orient my life around worship. Especially as I continued in my own process of discernment, thought about what God was calling me to do, how God was calling me to minister. Daily worship and prayer gave me clarity in the midst of asking all of these questions. It gave me peace as I not only

sought to discern what God was calling me to do, but also as I prayed that God would make my own thoughts and desires more Christ-like. As we sang these words of Simeon, I also felt Simeon's sense of peace and fulfillment.

Of course we know that our lives are supposed to center around worshiping our Savior. But so often, we are just going through the motions, doing things because we think we are supposed to. Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to be circumcised and dedicated because they knew it was what they were supposed to do. Even they were amazed at what Simeon was saying about this baby Jesus.

In this scene in the temple all of them are really observers, contemplating these words about God's purpose. All of them have what appear to be complicated purposes. There is Simeon who has been waiting his whole life to see the messiah. He finally has and is ok to die now. Mary has delivered the savior of the world, and as he grows, he will do stranger things than most teenagers. Every time in the New Testament she has a disagreement with her son, the Son wins. Is that normal? Jesus is always right if they decide to keep score. It seems that Mary's purpose is to be amazed. Same thing for Joseph. Joseph is Jesus' father through miraculous birth. As the parents of Jesus, they are just to watch Jesus as he does these wonderful things that marvel everyone and anger many.

Mary and Joseph each have a very difficult purpose in all of this. Do you ever wonder what you would have done in their shoes? I think the hardest part about living purposefully for God is giving up our own notions of what we WANT our purpose to be. In the weeks and months after the downturn of the economy, there were sadly several high profile suicides. The Chief financial officer of Freddie Mac hung himself. CEOs when their companies merged with others lost their jobs and had nothing to turn to, so they took their own lives. Some people made their careers or the processes of making money the ultimate thing in their life; and when that was gone their spirits were broken.

St. Augustine is famous for saying that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. The children's catechism that some of us had to memorize when we grew up started out with the question *Q. What is the chief end of man?* A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Our purpose is to be a witness to the grace of Jesus Christ. We are to have an answer to anyone who asks for a reason for hope. We were made to give praise to God and putting our ultimate hopes in anything else will only lead us to disappointment.

There is a good and right place for career, making money, and having a family, but those things cannot be the ultimate thing in our life. When I have centered my life around worship, such as my time with Paul Lang, I have felt that

peace that my purpose was to follow the way of Christ as allow my day to be centered on bringing a message of hope to all the people I come in contact with. I discovered that I was more thankful after worshiping.

To discover our purpose as followers of Christ means giving thanks. The inability to give thanks in our life may be a sign that we are trying to make our purpose be something other than following Christ. The challenge for today is find to find our purpose in our life through worship in whatever we are doing. Let us become aware of the needs around us and discover our purpose in Christ.