

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts meet with your gracious approval, my strength, my rock, and our salvation. Amen.

Why did Luke and only Luke bring the story of Simeon and Anna to us. Why would he bring two very old people into his gospel story. Three reasons I would like to share with you today.

The first is the fact that Simeon and Anna are old, devout, and righteous. In chapter one Luke tells the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth who are very old, devout and righteous. This story today tells us of God's active and beloved relationship with older people where new things happen.

Tradition tells us that Simeon was one of the seventy translators of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek. These translations started around the third century before Jesus was born and wasn't completed to around 132 B.C. So do the math. Simeon was an old man when Jesus was presented at the temple, some say he was 270 and still some 360 years old.

Anna is a widow for the better part of 84 years, so Anna is over 100 years old. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer day and night. Speaking of prayer - the pew research says that of the 55 % of Americans that say they pray daily, 65% are over the age of 65. Old is blessing us all.

Second, Anna is a woman and women are important in the gospel of Luke. Male dominance was taken for granted at this time. Jesus had twelve disciples and they were all men. No one would have understood if Jesus had some women as his disciples. Yet the seeds of something new are planted in the gospel of Luke.

Women are the ones who have courage and stick with Jesus after he is arrested as the men run away. Women are the main witnesses at the resurrection. Women in Luke are the ones who finance Jesus' ministry. And in today's gospel Anna is a widow and described as a prophet. A role overwhelming belonging to men. Anna speaks about the child in the temple to all who would listen.

Third, Simeon is in the story because of what he says about Jesus. Simeon takes the infant Jesus in his arms and praises God, saying,

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 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.' Simeon speaks about Jesus opening the door for the gentiles, for you and me to enter and be an heir of God's holy family. Like the angel tells the shepherds, "I'm bring you good news and great joy for all people."

Then Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph 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 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed —and a sword will pierce your own soul too.' In the beauty of the moment Simeon speaks of suffering, something is going to happen to break Mary's heart – her child is going to suffer and therefore so will she.

Simeon's statement tells us that in holding Jesus in his arms, he was now fully satisfied. His bucket list is complete. There was nothing left in life that he needed. For mine eyes have seen your salvation. God's salvation, to Simeon, salvation is not merely an idea, or a hidden code. To Simeon, "salvation" was a person! The person he's looking at! Salvation is first and foremost about relationship. Salvation is about the gift of being in relationship with Jesus or with those that bring us into a "right relationship" with God.

So let's think about the importance of relationships in our own lives. When we have healthy relationships we are all right, in a good place, but when our relationships are strained, dysfunctional or nonexistent then we are out of sorts.

Remember the movie "The Titanic" - rich girl Rose meets poor-boy, Jack, a stow-away. Jack comes to Rose's life from out of the blue at a time when she is in need, at a time when she is trapped. She's about to be married to a person she doesn't really want to be married to. She's caught in a world of luxury yet she feels that it's hemming her in. She's controlled by people who are too strong for her. She feels trapped in this world, unable to escape.

Jack comes along out of the blue – almost, as it were, from a different universe, a different world. He comes from a different class. He comes from a different background. And he shows her a different life that she couldn't

have imagined: not only emotionally, not only socially but quite literally. He takes her into the bowels of the Titanic as it's sailing towards its doom. He takes her to people she's never met before. He shows her a life, things going on that she couldn't have conceived of . . . And it changes her.

And just as quickly as he comes, of course he goes, he disappears. He doesn't make it. He drowns. She survives but he is gone – but only after he has led her to safety and only after he has helped her to have her eyes opened. In the movie, towards the end, Rose has been sharing this story with people who are exploring, looking for the Titanic on the Atlantic Ocean floor. And one of these is a person by the name of Luis. And Luis says “We never found anything on Jack. There's no record of him at all.” The team doubts that Jack really exists. But then Rose replies – much older Rose now: “No there wouldn't be would there. And I've never spoken of him until now, not to anyone . . . but now you know there was a man named Jack Dawson and that he saved me -- in every way that a person can be saved.”

On a human level it's relationships that save us, that give ultimate meaning to life, renewing our strength and giving us comfort especially when pain and suffering are unbearable. And so too with God.

One thing that I have observed during this pandemic is the gift of technology. I have seen zoom form more new relationships than I could ever have imagined. Particularly I see this in the studies taking place on zoom across churches, denominations, even cities and states. Growing relationships and fellowship that likely would not have happened. People who have embraced a new thing, a new possibility to form new relationships with each other as well as strengthening their relationship with the God whom they love, who is love.

Salvation is not a golden ticket we present at the pearly gates. But salvation at its simplest, “Salvation is where God is fully present.” And as C.S. Lewis said, hell is where we become more and more alone.

Simeon and Anna waited, and waited, prayed, had faith, trusted the promise and showed up to fully embrace the baby and the gift of salvation, the gift of relationship that God comes to us – as a free gift, a relationship that began eons ago and continues to show up no matter our age, no matter what is going on in our lives with ever new possibilities. All we have to do is open our eyes, our arms and our minds. Amen.