

Sermon (12/31/17, Luke 2: 22-40):

In an English class, during the early years of my College Days, we were given an assignment to write our own obituaries. Admittedly, it felt awkward and even a little creepy. There was so much of my story that had yet to be told! At least, that's what I had hoped!

What would I end up doing? At the time, I was a business major with an emphasis in Marketing. Would I write the next great ad campaign? Might it become a cultural icon like the Coke ad that first introduced a red capped, white bearded Santa Claus? Would it include a jingle so memorable that people would still be repeating it long after it was gone? Maybe something like the Big Mac McDonald's jingle which, to this day, I can still repeat – two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun.

Would I get married, have children, be a Dad? What kind of car would I drive? What kind of money would I make? Where would I live – in a city, the suburbs, a different state, maybe even a different country?

Most everything I put in that obituary would be conjecture – a product of my imagination. In a strange sort of way – it was an exercise in goal setting, at least according to what my wants and hopes were at that point in my life.

Perspective is everything, they say, and, to be sure, things surely do look different from where I am now than they did during those early days of College.

Such is what we sense in today's story. First there is Mary and Joseph-young and inexperienced parents bringing their first born to the Temple as required by the law.

It's easy to picture them standing there in the courtyard – dazed and confused by the large crowds and still reeling from the odd activities surrounding Jesus' birth. What did it all mean? What should they be feeling? Joy? Hope? Confusion? Distress? All of that? Where would life take them?

Off to the side was Simeon, an old Temple Priest. Now, for many of us, the first thought that comes to mind when considering a Temple Official is not exactly flattering. We've heard the stories of how corrupt

and power hungry these officials could be. We also know the role they played in Jesus' crucifixion.

Simeon is not that. We're told he was righteous and devout. We're told about how the Holy Spirit was upon him. Luke wants us to know that Simeon was a good man, a faithful man, a trustworthy man.

For reasons known only by the Spirit, Simeon was tugged to that outer court yard on the same day that Mary, Joseph, and their child were there. Out of the crowds of people meandering about, his eyes quickly latched on to this holy family.

It's a scene that's easy to picture. An old man who knows that the greater part of his life is now behind him. He had somehow been promised by the Spirit that his life would not end until he had seen the Messiah.

Tears quickly fill Simeon's eyes and flow down across the creases upon his face. He immediately moves towards the family. The excitement of the moment brings back his youthful energy as he moves faster than he had in a long time. His hands tremble with anxiousness as he reaches out to touch God's face. His thoughts race with a kind of hope he had all but given up on.

It is such a moving scene. We can't help but to feel Simeon's joy as his calloused fingers lightly tap Jesus' cheek. His lips quiver as he tries to take it all in. Could it be? Is it okay for him to believe that the God of words is now something he can touch and feel and see and meet?

Simeon looks at Mary, asking with his eyes if he can hold the child. Mary nods. Gently, Simeon reaches for Jesus, gingerly picking him up with all the care one would use when lifting something fragile yet priceless. He somehow finds his voice as their eyes meet.

'Finally,' He says in a whispered prayer. 'Finally, my eyes have seen your salvation, O God. Finally, I know the peace for which I have so long searched. Finally, I understand the direction towards which my entire life has been leaning since the days of my youth. Finally, there is peace.'

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So, okay, I just went to see the most recent Star Wars movie and, as one who likes to always be on the lookout for our Sovereign God's

intrusions into such stories, I couldn't help but to notice some parallels between Luke Skywalker's story and Simeon's.

For a fair amount of the movie we again meet up with this old friend from earlier movies. Instead of the idealistic, always hopeful, always optimistic, always impulsive hero we once knew, however, Luke Skywalker is now an old man – filled with remorse, bitterness, and grinding defeat. He is waiting out the final days of his life on a deserted island, hoping not to be found. His hopes are dashed, though, when a steely, impulsive, idealistic young lady, much like Luke once was, surprises him, seeking out his help. Eventually, she re-ignites something in Luke and, in the end, when Luke dies and when she describes what she senses by way of the reverberations of the force, she says, 'Luke is gone but I do not sense sadness...I sense contentment and purposefulness.'

It is what Simeon sensed when seeing the face of Jesus – his life had found contentment. His life's story had found its purpose.

Life changes, perspective changes, what we search for and hope to find changes as our lives are shaped by the journey God's Spirit takes us on.

The obituary I worked on during my College days was filled with conjecture centered around me – my successes, my achievements, my story. As I grow older, I feel a shift in what my eyes look for. The landscape I take in is so much broader now. I am far less the central player as those whom I love now take up a place of greater prominence. I am constantly on the look-out for God's redeeming hand, subtle though it might be. I find solace in knowing that this God I seek can redeem even the messes I've made and the magnificent failures I've authored. Physically I need to wear glasses now but spiritually I sense a different sort of clarity than I did before.

In today's story we are reminded of the need for both – the fresh eyesight of the young, like Mary and Joseph, filled with the open space of an unhindered conjectured future, pregnant with possibility and hope.

We also need the eyesight of the experienced like Simeon, whose clarity of sight is different, not necessarily better, just different and equally essential.

At the center of it all is Jesus, the One towards which all of our lives lean and the One whose redeeming ways will take us all by surprise, no matter what our age.

As one year passes and another begins, may the Holy Spirit rest upon us all as it did for Simeon, Mary, and Joseph. May it take us where it wills and may it teach us the lessons we need to learn-even when they are hard. May it open our eyes so that we might recognize Jesus even in the midst of a crowd. May our hearts know the power of faith filled dreaming provoked by an angel's words telling Mary that with God nothing is impossible. And may it remind us that, come what may, we are all in this together – young, old, and everything in between – each and all of us searching for the peace and purposefulness that only comes by way of the Spirit's lead.

Or, to put it another way using Star Wars lingo, may the Force be with us all.

To God alone be all the glory. Amen.