

Luke 2:22-40 – You Belong to God

We search for answers in trouble and tragedy, as if an answer “why” would really comfort our grief or bring peace to our hearts. We also try to make God reasonable so that faith is easier. As if it were really faith if it did not mean facing those things we neither comprehend nor find reasonable to believe. It is our struggle to make God wait upon us.

God does not belong to you. You belong to Him. Maybe that does not seem like a very important distinction but it is. God’s ways do not have to make sense to you. God does not ask or require your approval for anything He says and does. God does not call you to comprehend Him but to believe in Him, not to get Him but to be gotten by Him. Until this is driven into our hearts and minds, we will be distracted by our vain attempts to reason our way to God and our foolish attempts to domesticate a wild and powerful God. The truth is that we do not have trouble with a God who is too big but we are constantly led into valley of temptation and trials by our attempts to make God small, easy, comfortable, and reasonable.

Nowhere is that more true than today, as we meet Joseph and Mary in the Temple doing for Mary and for Jesus what the Law requires. It does not make sense to us and it does not need to. God has not spoken to us so that we get it. He has spoken to us so that we might believe in Him and believing have life in His name.

Jesus is taken to the Temple to be presented to God. But He is the Son of God, the Lord in flesh and blood. He is brought to the Temple but the Temple is His place; He commanded its building and designed its space and ordered what would take place therein. He is brought to the temple so that the sacrifice of the Law might be offered for Him but He is the sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is the God who was before time and now He is become an infant and laid into the hands of a waiting people symbolized by Simeon who waited for the redemption of Israel.

None of this makes sense. This is offensive to our modern sensibilities. Mary is unclean simply because she gave birth and yet she gave birth at the behest of God who placed His one and only Son within her womb. She must be cleansed from the blood shed in childbirth and yet she gave birth to Him who was born to shed His blood for you, for me, and for the whole world. You can try to reason your way out of this but it is the great paradox that refuses logic, reason, and understanding. God does not ask for us to find the “aha!” moment of understanding but to meet Him on the ground of faith.

God does not belong to you. You belong to Him. You do not get to decide what is relevant or not, what is the Gospel or what it is not, where God meets His people and what God gives to His people. God defines it all. He does not with some arbitrary purpose but for us and for our salvation. You do not get to pick and choose the God who saves you or how He saves you or what you like or do not like, what you can believe in and what is too far out for you to believe. God does not belong to you. You belong to Him.

The Lord has called you to be where He is. The Lord does not follow you around like a child who has trouble keeping up with his parent’s adult size steps. It is the other way around. In the same way, God is not simply there in the highest moments of a great life but in the worst moments of a terrible life. God is not some wonderful idea planted in your mind or some amazing experience to be remembered your whole life. We meet the Lord on the ground of faith. We trust what our minds cannot imagine and our hearts cannot even dream. We meet the Lord where He has chosen and promised to be found. We meet Him as the people of His promise who trust in the Word that endures forever.

We live by faith. We are like Simeon who went to the Temple day after day because the Lord promised to reveal His salvation to him there. We are like Joseph and Mary who knew the law of the Lord and who did it – not because it was a great idea or because they understood it but because the Lord said it. We are like Anna who was wounded

by a sorrowful life, losing her husband and living all alone with only the Lord as her comfort and hope. We hear the Word of the Lord and by the power of the Holy Spirit obey it with the obedience of faith. We are not His equals nor do we presume to get Him or the kind of love that would sacrifice His own Son for bunch of unruly, self-serving, sinners. God does not belong to us. We belong to Him.

So we come Sunday after Sunday and we listen to the same flawed and boring preachers tells us over and over again what God has done. We come week after week to meet the Lord not in some cool venue or some awesome place but in the dullness of a church with an altar, pulpit and font. We come here not because the pastor gets us or because he can tell us what we need to do to get our dreams. We come here as the dead in trespasses and sin to be made alive in Christ and as the lost to be found again and again and again. We come here not because it fits what we think or this kind of worship hits all our preferences but because God is here, where He has promised, in the voice of His Word and the flesh and blood of His Sacrament.

The temple where Jesus was presented and where the blessed Virgin was purified is no more. Its foundations remain but the building is gone. It had to go. The fulfillment of Israel's hope was not in an idea or in a place but in the Son of God in human flesh and blood. The atonement of their sins was never accomplished by the blood of lambs and goats and doves but was and is accomplished only by the God who become man, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Israel was not chosen for its goodness but as a light to hold up this Gospel promise until it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Now Gentiles stand with equal place to fulfill Isaiah's promise of God's House a house of prayer for all people. And it happens in the miracle of Jesus Christ.

Fathers, do not try to reason your sons into the Kingdom. Reveal to them Jesus just as God revealed Him to Simeon. Mothers, do not try to mold your daughters into some blueprint of womanhood. Reveal to them Jesus just as Anna rejoiced over Him who fulfilled Israel's waiting. Husbands, do not love your wives because you find them attractive; love your wives as Christ loved the Church even to death. Wives, do not wait for your husbands to be perfect to love them but respect your husbands as God's man in the home. Only then will peace come to you. So, come together as a family to this place where in Word and Supper God meets us with grace to forgive our sins, relieve our suffering, establish us in hope, and guide us to everlasting life. Come as those who wait upon the Lord. God does not belong to you. You belong to Him. Do not try to make Him reasonable or rational or tame. His grace is wild and His purpose is so radical that we can only meet Him on the ground of faith by the power of the Spirit.

It is enough to believe in Him, to trust in what He has promised and fulfilled, to meet Him where He has promised to be found, and to look forward to the future He has prepared. This sad life is not all there is – not in its grandest moments or in its worst terrors. God has come to lead you to the place where night gives way to eternal day, where darkness gives way to light, where sin is banished by forgiveness, and where life triumphs over death once for all.

In this blessed hope, we wait upon the Lord, as those who waited in the past and who wait still, and we meld our voices with Simeon of old, with the saints who learned to sing His song, and with blessed Mary and faithful Joseph: *Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word. For my own eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of Your people Israel.*