

Date: December 27, 2020 (Christmas 1)

1. Texts: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Ps. 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40.
2. Subject: proclamation of Jesus.
3. Topic: proclamation *to* us and *through* us.
4. Aim: challenge.
5. Proposition: "God proclaims his salvation to and through us."

GOD'S PROCLAMATION

It's a good time for a review.

The Bible is the authoritative and normative library of God's dealings with his Chosen People, the Jews.

On screen share.

That's our definition of the Bible.

The Bible has one primary objective:

to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the long-awaited Messiah who brings God's salvation to humanity.

On screen share.

So, through the Old Testament we see God working with his Chosen People to prepare for the coming of the Messiah and in the New Testament we have the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah.

This definition and purpose make it clear why we Christians read the Bible, over and over again.

This definition and purpose also make it clear how we disciples approach that Bible reading. Each time we hear the Bible read to us or each time we sit down to study it, we are listening for God to speak to us and so to reveal to us that Jesus is Lord. We expect, look forward to and hope for God's proclamation to us every time we open the Bible.

It's fascinating and hugely instructive that this is exactly what was happening with Simeon and Anna on that day in the temple. They were both in the temple all the time and looking for God's proclamation. They were expecting the Messiah to be revealed to them. Then, one day—BANG—there it was: the proclamation through the Spirit to both of them that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. They lived the definition and purpose of the Bible.

Of course, it did not end with them. The Spirit proclaimed *to* Simeon and Anna that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah. That proclamation rushed *through* them to others—which is the way God always works. He proclaims his will *to* his people and that proclamation passes *through* them to others. In essence, the proclamation *to* Simeon and Anna transformed them into the proclamation of God *to* others. Those who have received the proclamation of God become the channel of that proclamation for others.

It's just as fascinating and instructive how that proclamation was passed on. Both Simeon and Anna proclaimed the Messiah with praise and joy. They experienced the fulfillment of God's salvation for themselves and were overflowing with gratitude and thanksgiving. Praise and joy burst from them to anyone who would listen.

Of course, by now it must be abundantly clear to you where this sermon is headed. We Anglicans are the people of the Bible. We have four readings each Sunday. Our liturgies are filled with biblical quotes and guided by biblical principles. Our Church used to chain Bibles in churches so that they would not be stolen and would be available to people to read. Scripture forms one leg of the tripod of supports for our faith, the other two being reason and tradition. So, the definition and purpose of the Bible are to define our discipleship and give purpose to our proclamation. As Simeon and Anna passed the proclamation of God on to those who would listen, so are we to do.

And we would do well to follow their example and pass the proclamation on to others through praise and joy.

The question that remains is how do we reach that point? How do we find the praise and joy inside which we can share with others on the outside? This is not easy to sort out in a single sermon—maybe not in any number of sermons. Sermons may be the wrong tool for this, but right now it is the tool we have.

According to the Gospel of Luke, it all begins with the hope and expectation of a Messiah. It begins, then, with the promise of God to save his people. This is what the Old Testament illustrates for us. Throughout the centuries we see the

people of Israel trying to figure out how to be the people of God and often getting things quite wrong. But throughout their centuries they developed the expectation to see God's salvation. As a people they came to realize that their hope didn't lie in politics, warfare or economics. Their future resided in the Messiah. This is the hope and expectation that propelled Simeon and Anna into the temple day after day. It was the certainty of its fulfillment that propelled their praise and joy.

So, we can reach that point of praise and joy by personally experiencing the fulfillment of our hope and expectation of the Messiah. But that means that we must actually hope for and expect the Messiah to be our Saviour. That's not easy.

You see, most people are hoping for money or position or power to be their saviour. It happens all the time. People play the lottery. Others sock away cash into investments. Right now people are looking to the Covid vaccine to save them from isolation and fear. Others dream that if only they could find the right job or the right spouse, their future would be ok.

But disciples of Christ place their hope in God and expect him to be their salvation. Ultimately this means shifting our focus away from our circumstances and training our sight onto ourselves as human beings. You see, salvation does not mean being saved from our circumstances. Salvation means being saved from the consequences of our distance from God. Distance from God equals exclusion from his purpose and kingdom. We don't need to be saved from poverty. We need to cope with poverty. We don't need to be saved from Covid-19. We have to cope with and treat Covid-19. We need to be saved from our human condition. Simeon and Anna knew this on a countrywide basis. This recognition was part of their Jewish identity.

You and I have to reach this conclusion. Then we realize that the Messiah has saved us from the consequences of our distance from God. Oh, sometimes it takes a crisis for us to realize that we need saving, but once we have come to that conclusion, it is possible for us to recognize Jesus as our Saviour. That's where the praise and joy enter in. God has moved heaven and earth to save us. God has made himself our champion and hero. In Christ there is no distance between us

and God. He has made himself one with us so that we might be made one with God. That is the source of our praise and joy.

But no one can tell you how to get to the point of salvation, praise and joy. Our paths to salvation are not identical. In some cases they won't even be similar. We can reach the point of praise and joy. We can watch God bridge the gap between himself and us. We can experience Jesus as Messiah, just as Simeon and Anna did. This is our lesson today from the library of God's dealings with his Chosen People, the Jews.

AMEN.