**January 7, 2024 Luke 2:22-40**

***Bucket List***

**Scripture:** Luke 2:22-40 NRSV

*(22)When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him 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 designated as holy to the Lord"), (24)and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." (25)Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. (26)It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. (27)Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, (28)Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, (29)"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; (30)for my eyes have seen your salvation, (31)which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32)a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (33)And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. (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." (36)There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, (37)then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. (38)At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (39)When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. (40)The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.*

**Notes:**

1. Luke was a ***Gentile*** writing his Gospel to ***Gentile*** believers.
   1. Luke is writing to a people of non-***Jewish*** descent.
   2. The salvation Jesus brings is for ***all*** people.
2. Luke goes out of his way to show Jesus’ ***Jewishness***.
   1. Jesus’ family ***observed*** the Law,
   2. The whole family comes to the Temple for their “***purification***.”
   3. The lamb being offered, was in fact, the ***Lamb*** of ***God***.
3. “Why the emphasis on Jesus’ ***Jewishness***?”
   1. The need to connect Jesus with the ***God*** of ***Israel***.
   2. Jesus was ***THE*** Son of ***THE*** God!
   3. Through Jesus’ ***Jewishness*** the story is the living out of God’s promised salvation.
   4. Our larger context is our ***Christian*** ***faith***.
4. A Christian ***Bucket*** ***List*** is something we ought to consider.
   1. The first thing on our bucket list ought to be a ***genuine*** ***hope*** to see Christ.
   2. We see Christ every day; when we ***look*** for Him.
   3. Discover the joys of ***faithful*** ***living*** that come to us through simple moments,
   4. As disciples of Jesus Christ, it’s about a bucket poured out in love for ***God*** and ***neighbor***.

**Script:**

Good morning… It is a good morning isn't it? Everybody is here, we seem to have made it through the holiday season, almost unscathed. What about your New Year's Resolution? Have you been able to keep it up so far? You know what I am talking about don’t you? The list of things that you choose to change in the year to come about yourself, your lifestyle, and your habits both good and bad. Most people call them New Year's resolutions, other people just call them a waste of time, for they are items in your life that you seem to be unable to change.

I have a few things that have been on my list of items to resolve. First as most of you have heard me mention over the past year I am trying to focus on lowering my A1C blood sugar. doctors would like it below 6.0, but in 2016, the year after my retirement from teaching my A1C was at 6.3, which wasn’t too bad. Then covid hit and in years of covid my A1c steadily increased until this past January I peaked at 8.2, NOT GOOD. My doctor immediately put me higher doses of meds and introduced a few others. In the following four months I followed the diet that he recommended, I went to the gym, and I worked hard at getting my A1c lowered. My next set of blood tests showed that my hard work paid off. My A1c dropped to 6.3 which is relatively close to where it had been pre-pandemic. However, I eased up on diet and physical activity and haven’t seen improvement. I go next week for more blood work and we will see how much it improved or declined. So, I don't really have resolutions for the upcoming year except to maintain the hard work that helped me lower my A1c. Instead of Resolutions, perhaps I should prepare a bucket list.

After all, it’s the time of year for lists, so why not a Bucket List?  Do you have a Bucket List, a full Bucket List?  You know, things you would like to accomplish before you leave this world; a list of things you want to do before you “kick the bucket?” Sure, it’s a slightly crude way of looking at our inevitable demise, but it does call us to focus on living and not dying. That is after all what the Lord is calling us to do, live fully until we are called home to be with him.

Today we are going to read about a fella who had his own bucket list. He had set his mind on his bucket list and the Lord, God, said that it would be achieved before he passed from this world into God’s presence. Stand with me and open your bibles, as we share in the reading today of our passage in Luke 2:22-40.

*(22)When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him 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 designated as holy to the Lord"), (24)and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." (25)Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. (26)It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. (27)Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, (28)Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, (29)"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; (30)for my eyes have seen your salvation, (31)which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, (32)a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (33)And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. (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." (36)There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, (37)then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. (38)At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (39)When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. (40)The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Luke 2:22-40 NRSV*

Some of these verses I shared with those who attended the Christmas eve communion. But as one reads these verses we are introduced to Simeon and Anna, two faithful followers of Yahweh. Simeon had a bucket list, and a very unusual one at that. As we read this passage, we are told that the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that he would see the Lord’s Messiah before he died.  So, there was just that one thing on Simeon’s Bucket List?  No trip to Disney World or climb up Mount Everest; no fancy French dinner in Paris at midnight or mid-afternoon with the star of his choice? Simeon had but one desire — to see the Lord’s Messiah?

At first it doesn’t seem like much, but the more you think about it, you begin to realize that is a pretty big promise, and a large item for his bucket. As it turns out, it was even bigger than Simeon expected.  We’re told that Simeon was looking forward to the “consolation of Israel.”  In other words, he was looking forward to God’s people being saved; the salvation of God’s people, Israel.  But look at what happens.  The Holy Spirit reveals to Simeon, and no, we are not told how, that he would see the Lord’s Messiah before he died.  Everyday Simeon, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, would look for someone entering the temple, waiting for a child born the Messiah, waiting for the confirmation from the Holy Spirit that this child is the one. Every day, as parents brought their children to the Temple for the rites of purification, Simeon would look to see if maybe this one was the Christ. We are not told how he would know that it is the Messiah, only that he was under the direction of the Holy Spirit; we just have to believe that he would know.

Then the day came, just like every other day, Simeon is in the temple waiting. Then in walks this young couple and without hesitation, Simeon knew, he just knew that Mary and Joseph were the ones; they had arrived and with them they brought HIM, the ONE, this unnamed child who was the Messiah. Imagine the scene as Mary and Joseph walk to the priest, can you feel Simeon’s eyes watching them? Watching As they offer up the required sacrifice, can you see the anticipation on Simeons face? As they state what the baby’s name shall be, I imagine Simeon listening intently, And when he hears the child’s name Simeon’s eyes opening wide, and his jaw drops with his mouth agape; I imagine Simeon jumping to his feet, and with as much reverence as he can produce moving quickly to greet the family. Watch Simeon asking and after being permitted, gently lifting the child from his mother’s arms. Then without any anticipation from anybody else Simeon looks into the baby’s eyes and begins to prophecy. He declares that this child was not only Israel’s salvation, but the salvation of the Gentiles as well!

I’m not sure how the people in the temple reacted to this statement, but it was a very bold one at that. We don’t quite catch the magnitude of this prophecy because we have been raised in the Christian tradition, one that believes that Jesus came for the salvation of all people. You remember John 3:16 and 17, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* To stand in any Jewish Temple and announce that a child was born to be the salvation of all people, would defy everything they had been taught. This would be something radically new.

A couple of things to remember here.  First our gospel writer, Luke, was a Gentile writing his Gospel to Gentile believers.  Do you remember how Luke’s gospel begins?  Luke states that he is writing to the *“most excellent Theophilus,…so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.” (Luke. 1:3-4)*  Luke is writing his Gospel to an audience of Gentiles, people of non-Jewish descent. This is to an audience brought from some high ranking official named Theophilus.  Incidentally, we don’t know who Theophilus was, but we do know his name meant “friend of God.”

So to hear early in Luke’s gospel that the salvation Jesus brings is for all people is really quite striking.  It really is the Good News!  Nevertheless, it appears that Luke goes out of his way to show Jesus’ Jewishness.   Five times in our text we are told that Jesus’ family observed the Law. It is found in verse 22, 23, 24, 27, and 39.  Jesus’ life begins with fulfilling the Law and coming to the Temple.  The whole family comes to the Temple for their “purification.” Mary, as a new mother, was to undergo a rite of purification 40 days after she had given birth.  The usual sacrifice offered after the rite of purification was a one-year-old lamb along with a pigeon or a turtle dove as a sin offering. But if the family could not afford a lamb, two turtledoves or two pigeons could be offered. The text mentions a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons” this tells us that Jesus’ family was too poor to bring a lamb. We could, however, read this passage symbolically and see that the lamb being offered, was in fact, the Lamb of God, Jesus himself.

Once again, we have to ask, “Why the emphasis on Jesus’ Jewishness from Luke, the Gentile?”  Well, I believe that it has to do, for the most part, with the need to connect Jesus with the God of Israel.  Jesus was not just a son of a god; he was THE Son of THE God!  And not just any god/God, but THE God.  The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of creation.  The God of the Exodus.  The God of the wilderness.  The one and only true God, i.e. not one of those fake Greek or Roman gods. It’s through Jesus’ Jewishness that Luke places his gospel into a bigger story, into a much larger context.  Through Jesus’ Jewishness the story of the Messiah becomes the story of the Law fulfilled and the living out of God’s promised salvation for all people. It is no longer the story of the Israelites, or the story of the Jews, but the story of all of humanity, you and I included.

In the movie *The Bucket List*, Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman star as two cancer patients who become the most unlikely of friends and end up spending three months together each fulfilling a “bucket list” of things they’d always wanted, before dying.  What they discover is that their bucket lists really have more to do with living life to the fullest than with dying.  They end up discovering that what gives each the greatest joy is not the selfish, self-centered items on their bucket lists, but the things they took for granted like a meal with family or the love shared between friends.  Jack Nicholson’s character learns the hard way.  It takes the death of his new found friend for Nicholson’s character to re-engage with his estranged daughter and sense the saving grace that flows from forgiveness.  There’s nothing earth shattering in the movie, nothing terribly profound.  But it does perhaps call into question two things. First, the value of having a bucket list; and second, the content of that bucket list.

Our larger context is our Christian faith.  We believe that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.  We believe that God’s gift of eternal life begins right here and now.  We know the grace of forgiveness and we know how refreshing it feels.  We know the joy of faith and the strength, determination, and grit it gives each of us.  So maybe a Christian Bucket List is something we ought to consider.  Not because we’re afraid to die, maybe because we are not living life to its fullest, but mostly because in Christ we’re longing to live!

Perhaps we can learn something from old Simeon.  Possibly the first thing on our bucket list ought to be a genuine hope to see Christ as well; to experience a real relationship with the God of the Universe.  If that were on our bucket list it wouldn’t take long to discover the fact that we can and do see the Messiah, the Christ, each and every day; but only when we look for him.  We see God’s saving Son in acts of care and compassion, in the love we share as the family of God, in the forgiveness we experience and the forgiveness we extend. Beyond that, our individual bucket lists could contain a whole host of different things, but they would all find themselves flowing from this larger context, a life of faith grounded in and focused on Jesus Christ.

Don’t get me wrong, there’s nothing wrong with wanting things, wanting nice things, going on tropical vacations, embarking on wondrous adventures, entertaining someone who is rich and famous, or being entertained by them.  It’s more a matter of discovering the joys of faithful living that come to us through simple moments, in our everyday life, through the things we take for granted, and the people we see on a regular basis.

God is at work in our lives, every day. He is touching our lives and calling us to greater heights of love, discipleship, and evangelism.  For us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, it’s always been about living, living faithfully and fully not worrying about dying for Christ has done the dying for us.  As disciples of Jesus Christ, it’s not even about a full bucket, but a bucket perpetually poured out in love for God and love for neighbor. SO today I encourage you to fill your bucket with the desires of God for your life. Draw into a deeper walk with Jesus. Extend Jesus' love to all you encounter. Be the example of Jesus for others to see, and look for others who are doing the same. We can face the tomorrows of 2024 Because Jesus lives.