

The Presentation of Jesus Year C February 2 2025

... and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Luke 2:22-40

I am like most people who live in the United States, I like the convenience my life provides. When I want a book, I can look on Amazon and either order an electronic copy or have a physical book delivered to my door within 24 hours. I want to send a letter to someone I can do so with a click of a button or a touch on my phone. If I am not up to cooking a meal, no problem says Corpus, there are many restaurants and stores to visit. Even now, people don't have their own vehicle because with opening an app on their phone, they can have someone come to pick them up and take them to their desired location. Since COVID-19 other convenience services have been created all with the intention of making people's lives easier.

To be frank, I enjoy having access to all these services. However, there is a part of my mind that is not that comfortable with the ease in life. In my mind I have a strong sense that when everything is so easy, I believe there is a loss of value and meaning. If life is so easy is there any value left?

When I was first working out after a long furlough from exercise, I was in a weight room, and I was complaining about feeling sore. One of the attendees who clearly had spent time in the gym turn to me and said, "Pain is the weakness leaving the body." I laughed. Yet, he was making an important point, if there is no pain and effort, is there any value? When it comes to matters that are important in my life, it helps to consider what is important to me. Do my wants and needs have the value that requires intentional effort? With this focused determination, it comes with a risk that my effort will not pay off. I could be disappointed or even betrayed by circumstances and people in my life. However, God will not disappoint. My trust in God to provide value is biblical.

When Jesus is eight days old, his family followed their Jewish religious customs, he was to be presented to God at the Temple. And according to other Jewish traditions, Mary had to be purified by God after she gave birth to her first-born son. The Gospel of Luke combines these two traditions. While this unassuming new family was following their religious customs there was a man named Simeon who was also visiting the Temple for a different reason.

This older man of great devotion was informed that he would see the consolation or the salvation of Israel. God informed Simeon that before he would die, he would know that the suffering of his people will be relieved, and those whom he loved will witness the blessings of God. I think because Simeon was a man of a

great and informed belief, he knew how to wait for the spirit of God to act. I am not surprised to read in Luke that when Simeon, an old man, sees the baby Jesus, he knows without any doubt that he is witnessing his hopes being realized. Israel will be redeemed because God has acted to restore hope to a people who needed their optimism to be brought alive. Simeon saw and knew the value of Jesus as a baby.

In a moment of great happiness Simeon gives praise and acknowledges that God's gift of redemption will be for all humanity. However, this gift of redemption will come at a cost, both publicly and personally.

He tells Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and 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."

There will be a price to be paid for this blessing to come alive. That price will be measured in human terms and conditions. It will not be convenient, but it will be well worth the effort.

Walter Russell Bowie, who was a priest, author, editor, educator, hymn writer, and lecturer in the Episcopal Church had this to say about the rise and fall of many in today's Gospel reading. What I find prophetic is what he said was published in 1952 and I think what he has to say is relevant today.

He wrote:

(quote) The judgements of Jesus by which men will fall or rise are not the judgments of the world. The world judges by numbers and mass and money. It wants to know of any life or of any situation whether the majority is on its side, whether the majority is on its side, whether the weight of opinion of the so-called "best people" is already with it, **whether it commands financial support.** The mind of the world acts according to a kind of crowd contagion and may be very much afraid of individual differences, even for conscious sake. **(end of quote).**

I think there is informative wisdom in what Walter saw in humanity. What gives Walter more weight is that he penned this over 73 years ago. Clearly, we can see that we can use some guidance and hope. Walter pointed out that God is ready to respond. And here is how.

Walter said.

(quote) But Christ everywhere and always would put the spiritual values above the material ones. He (being Jesus) would maintain always and everywhere the sacred worth of human personality; and therefore, any policy in business or economics or social relationships, or anything else which has become so **obsessed with ideas and prejudices** that it is relatively indifferent to the consequences of those human lives, **is a repudiation of the spirit of Christ.** He (naming Jesus) came to bring redemption through love, and he lived and died in that supremely heroic faith. **(end of quote).**

The speed at which our society wants answers to the current tragic events has overwhelmed us. We turn to experts for answers as they too struggle to keep up with the rapidly changing world and events. Their answers to our demanding questions are incomplete because so often it is reactive rather than a careful and measured response. Our ever-expanding need for order has created a chaotic world. Sadly, when public fear takes over our public agendas, the presence of hope is pushed aside. People seek safety within a crowd, yet when the crowd is bound together with fear, the life of the group is consumed with hostile intent. Within this growing hostile crowd, the voices of mercy, forgiveness, and love are overlooked and pushed aside or even completely blocked out.

When the Gospel is offered in this growing hostile environment the message will encounter resistance. For the Gospel of Jesus is asking for the crowd to give up its fear and along with this sacrifice comes certainty of the crowd being righteous with their hostility toward others. For mercy, forgiveness and love to be expressed it takes time and effort to be understood and applied. To be engaged in this transformative action, it comes at a cost.

Where do we find the courage to embrace this vision of hope that God promised to all of humanity? Can we be transformed by Jesus' love? We find our resolution to act and the strength to wait in our stories of faith. We discover this dream of God in the bible. As we look to Jesus we are given a choice. Can we accept God and actively wait for Jesus to work in our lives rather than continue to take matters in our own hands and work to control the outcomes? Can we find our way to accept Jesus and live within our own personal limits or do we believe that we can do better than what God has to offer?

Simeon waited for the Lord. He was active with his faith and lived his life according to God's calling of being patient, kind and merciful with others. He continued to keep alert for God, and he was not disappointed. It was in his later part of his life that he got to witness his Savior who, unlike the kings and leaders of Jesus' day, expressed unity through a forced social compliance and fear but instead redeemed the world by expressing love and mercy.

When we choose to stand with Jesus means that there is a price to pay. This price could be the risk that other organizations and people may or may not always be aligned with those who is following Jesus. People who follow Jesus as their King may be rejected by their own peers. Christ followers can be frustrated by the lack of justice that is offered. Christians may have to wait and work at keeping their faith alive in Jesus knowing that God's blessing may take more time that they anticipated.

I don't welcome the idea that I could being rejected by others and I am sure I am not alone. However, there is something to be said about trusting Jesus when the world around us does not act in a trustworthy way. In our growing chaotic world, we know there is hope in focusing on Jesus. We know in our minds that the Holy Spirit will provide us with the strength to endure and to give us a reason to be excited. As we continue to embrace the truth that Jesus is our Lord, I hope that we find our active waiting to be infused with a healthy sense of humor. With God's love that is immersed in health humor and laughter, we will be able to acknowledge the dignity of every human being and know that it is better to love than to be consumed by hate.

Jesus made it clear that for the world to change and for us to embrace his vision of the Kingdom of God we need to change and there will be a price to be paid for this transformation. Our personal egos will be reviewed, and personal motivations will no longer be held secretly. This level of transparency comes at cost, but the benefit of God's love far outweighs the loss of human pride. Yes, there will be growing emotional pains. However, the soreness biblical transformation is the weakness of evil and death is leaving the body of Christ.

As we live into the coming months, I pray that St. Mark's will be given the courage from God to do the work of mercy and grace and pay the loving price to be the church that Jesus is calling us to be.

May we all laugh and find reasons to celebrate as Jesus's will unfolds in our lives.