

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word of God that we consider today is from the Gospel according to Luke: *“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.”*

Simeon had waited a long time but he had finally seen what he was waiting for. He was at peace and felt that if he were to die now, he could die happily. How many of us could say the same? Could we say that we are completely satisfied with what we have seen in our life so that we could die happily today?

This time of year is often a little disappointing. Christmas Day is passed. The cold weather is just beginning and we’re already sick of it. The gift exchange is over. Each year, most of us get some good things but we also get a few things that miss the mark. As we reflect on 2017, was it all we hoped it would be? I just pulled out a list of goals I had set for myself this year. I got some of them done: A book I wanted to finish reading, a home improvement project, Reformation events I hoped our church could put together were executed very well, thanks to all of you. But other goals are going to have to be carried over to next year – “finish sermons no later than Friday,” “Establish better prayer and devotional practices.” 2017 may not be what we hoped it would be. Life isn’t perfect. So could we die happily, if that were God’s will today, or would we feel like so much was left incomplete?

Simeon was waiting for something to be complete but it wasn’t a goal of his own making. God had promised him that he would not die until he had seen the promised Savior of Israel. Oh, to have such a promise! Surely he awoke each day with eager anticipation in his bones – *This day, maybe even this morning, this might be the Day!* I wonder if a lifetime of anticipation left him with a sore neck as he constantly craned to scan the crowds coming to the temple each day.

Finally he saw him. An ordinary infant. The 40-day old Messiah. Mary and Joseph had come to Jerusalem to the temple, as was the Jewish custom. 40 Days after giving birth to a son, a woman was to bring an offering: either a lamb, or for those who could not afford a lamb, a pair of pigeons or doves. Incidentally, this passage lets us know that Mary and Joseph were relatively poor because they gave the alternate sacrifice.

As soon as they arrived, Simeon knew this boy was the one. He rejoiced and took Jesus into his arms, cradling eternity and he blessed God with what we now know as the *Nunc Dimittis*, which just means “Now dismiss.” *“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.”* “This is the one I’ve been waiting for. Now I can go in peace. If I died today, I would die a happy man for I have seen and held my salvation!” He returned the fragile infant to the wondering grasp of his mother. And then Simeon waited. And waited. And...waited. Did he live for an hour after seeing his Savior? A year? Even a decade? We don’t know. Even

though the Spirit's promise had been fulfilled, Simeon died still waiting. He had seen his salvation, even touched it, but not the consummation of it. The Jesus he saw had not yet completed the work of the Christ. He was a baby. He hadn't been baptized, hadn't squared off against the Tempter, hadn't performed any signs and wonders, hadn't been crucified for the sins of the world, hadn't risen from the dead, hadn't ascended back to glory, and hadn't returned to restore all of creation. Simeon died still waiting for all of that but he died satisfied and happy. For him, God's promise was enough. He had faith that the child in his arms was the one who would accomplish all those things.

We also wait for the completion of God's plan, which we grasp by faith. Simeon waited for the consolation of Israel. We wait for the consolation of all believers. We wait for it eagerly because we want and need it. We continue to live in an imperfect world plagued by the cruel dominion of sin and death. Again, all we need to do is reflect on the year that is ending. We have all failed to meet our own goals, let alone to live up to what God intends us to be. There are people who were here last Christmas whom death has parted from us. Our own families and our church family mourn that we are not able to be together this New Year. God's work is not finished, so we wait for Jesus to return, to rescue, to resurrect, and to restore.

Like Simeon, we have a promise! We should awake each day with eager anticipation in our bones – *This day, maybe even this morning, this might be the Day!* 2018 might be the year when Christ returns! And it might not be. And if not, do we have enough for our lives to be complete? If today were the day you died, would you die happy? Would you be at peace?

The text we have from the Gospel of Luke suggests an answer: *yes*. Yes, God has given us enough in this life for us to say, "*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace.*" 2017 was not the perfect year. This life isn't perfect. There is much that we have left undone, goals to strive toward...but God has given us much. The child Simeon held in his arms grew and fulfilled his mission as the Christ of God. He gave his life as the ransom payment for poor lowly sinners and as the nails pierced him, the sword of sorrow pierced through his mother's soul, just as foretold. He is risen victorious from the grave and continues to live! Like Simeon, our own eyes have seen his salvation! We have handled and tasted the Lord's Christ! He meets us in the flesh in Holy Communion.

Have you ever wondered why almost every week, we sing the *Nunc Dimittis* after Communion? Does it make you wonder, "Doesn't Pastor know any other good songs for after communion? Doesn't he realize we just sang this one last week?" Here's why we sing Simeon's song – because at the altar we have just had an experience very much like his. He was blessed to see his Savior with his own eyes and then he needed nothing else. His life was complete. If he died at that moment, he would have died a happy man. We have been blessed to commune with the Lord, and though we may not wish to die right there at the communion rail, if we did, we will have died happy and satisfied. What more do we truly need from life than an encounter with the love of God incarnate? It's the perfect way to conclude 2017 so that we can honestly say, "*Lord, if this was my last full year on earth, I could die happy, you are letting your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your*

*salvation.*” As long as we live, may total satisfaction and peace in Christ accompany us into the New Year.

AMEN.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.