

Merry Christmas! No matter what 2020 has brought we are together, while apart, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus and wonder at the mystery. Today I am preaching out to an empty sanctuary. But I want us all to imagine being together in this space. Can you see it? The beautifully lit trees, the organ playing as we gather in, Cora possibly zipping around with a few of her friends in the kinderum. It is odd to think that a year ago this is where we all were. Not even one of us thinking that a year later we would be worshipping from home with a pandemic going on around us. There are somethings we simply cannot see coming. Too, there is something to be said about our ability to imagine the past

for that is what we have experienced.

However, to imagine the future is a little more challenging at times. Through Christ we have the promised hope but then our current situation, at time, might have you thinking something like...

That 2020 is like this as someone put it

If 2020 was a slide (a slide that drops at a 90-degree angle)

- If 2020 was a car (held together by duct tape)
- If 2020 was a pinata (a hornet nest)
- If 2020 was a hula hoop (a roll of barbed wire)

If 2020 was a swing (it would hit a brick wall)

I say these as a light hearted look at our year we have had but at times these images may have rung true for you as well. It has been said, I hold it as true, that we are not all in the same boat but we are all in the same storm.

A year ago we had dreams and hopes of what 2020 might look like. 2020 most likely did not meet much of our hopes and dreams but we still look forward.

Knowing the love of our creator is with us always and we can rest on the promise of that which is to come.

How can we see what is coming ahead? In our Gospel today Simeon and Anna both did just that. They knew of the promises from God that were to come, and they kept their eyes fixed on those promises every day. Every day they were in the temple worshiping God. I can only begin to imagine the trauma and stressors that were going on around them on a daily basis but yet they kept their eyes fastened on God.

Can you imagine worshiping God in the temple day in and day out? As beautiful as our sanctuary is, I still don't know if I could dedicate my life to being in here every day no matter what. Simeon and Anna knew God had called them to the temple and they followed. Maybe God hasn't called us all to daily temple living, for we know the church is not the building but the people. However, God does call us into

following and living our lives in light of the Gospel. Waiting in anticipation for the day when they would see God's promise fulfilled. How surprising it must have been for Simeon and Anna for this fulfillment to come as a little child born to a young mother. How too is it surprising when God shows up in the unexpected places today. The young parents bringing their baby to the temple as was custom to do in those days. Bringing with them the sacrifice of turtle doves. A sure sign of their poverty as those with means would have brought an entire sheep for sacrifice. God literally came down in the lowest form possible yet did amazing things and gifted us all the greatest gift of love we can know. But if we were in the temple with Simeon and Anna would we have noticed? Would our eyes have been open to what was going on right in front of us because our minds were fixed on the promise to come.

There is an artist, John Zachary, who created a nativity scene on the lawn of Claremont, Ca every Advent season. Zachary would come up with scenes that were provocative and made the people who passed by hopefully see the birth narrative in a new way. In 2014 he put up a bus stop. Within the bus stop he put a woman and child to represent the Madonna and child. Around then were advertisements and images that spoke to the commercial part of the Christmas season. Zachary wanted not only to stir up emotions of joy with Christmas but to call out that which is all too real in our world today. With the images Zachary put up this poem.

We don't see.

Christmas lights catch our eye.

The tinsel and the glitter, the cookies, and the presents.

Shopping sales and chocolates.

We don't see.

The kids hungry in school

Every day

Infants nursed in bus stops and alleys.

Toddlers with no safe playgrounds.

Families with no home, no safety, no Christmas.

If Jesus was born today

To an unwed mother

A teenage unwed mom

A teenage unwed oppressed minority mom

Would we see?

Traveling through our town

On the Metro or the bus

Late at night

Would we see?

We are people of the inn:

Sleeping next door to the One from God

Born out back, down the alley,

In a cave that we never noticed

never cared to see.

We are people of the inn

Warm, with food enough for feasting,

water to drink, meds to take,

And presents under the tree.

We see the latest, the newest, the brightest

We see what we want, what we desire,

And infants and toddlers and children of the poor

are unnoticed, even held responsible.

But God sees. I hear their cries, says the Lord.

This imagery brought up by the bus shelter and poem call us to stop and see God in our midst but to also continue to look forward to that which is yet to happen.

As we rush forward to the next shiny thing. To the next event or challenge that awaits us I wonder. Are we willing to sit and be still to see Jesus in our midst? Or are we so wrapped up in the hustle and bustle of life that we need to stop our minds, even just for a moment, to let the Spirit meet us here and to continue to meet us in these coming days.

It is always surprising just how busy Covid life has continued to be for some.

Along with seeing that which is in our midst can we see that which is to come?

Simeon and Anna did not only see the present state but were able to see in the coming of what seemed like an ordinary child, the coming of God. How do we develop the eyes of Simeon and Anna?

What does it feel like to see the beginning of something new - and imagine its completion ahead of time? I wonder what about our lives after Covid? With vaccines beginning to come...I wonder how is it we will reacclimate ourselves into the world around us? How will we reenter into fellowship with our neighbors near and far? Everything is new/everything is terrifying. But if we are like Simeon and Anna the uncertainty of that which is to come becomes a little less scary because we, like them, can hold onto the promise God has given us of grace abounding and love eternal.

I am drawn to the Peanuts comic strip A Peanuts cartoon:

Lucy and Linus were sitting in front of the television set when Lucy said to Linus, "Go get me a glass of water." Linus looked surprised. "Why should I do anything for you? You never do anything for me." Lucy promised, "On your 75th birthday, I'll bake you a cake." Linus got up, headed to the kitchen, and said, "Life is more pleasant when you have something to look forward to." Unlike Simeon and Anna Linus isn't able to trust fully in the promise but none the less something ahead gives us hope and something to watch for.

What is it we watch and look forward to? What hopes and dreams are you looking ahead to with all certainty?

2020 has shown some ugly truths about inequality, injustice, and hatred that has woven itself through the country. How can we be like Simeon and Anna and live into 2021 trusting in the promise of God while keeping our minds set on that which is to come? Jesus is born - the prince of peace, yet at times there is no peace - wonderful counselor, yet people are more divided than ever. How do we continue to “greatly rejoice in the Lord” for God enfleshed among us while also speaking out and “not keep[ing] silent”? Theology of Hope for what is to come in spite of the seeming reality. As the vaccine comes out and we can slowly and cautiously come back to life together again how is it we will live the promise of the cross in our lives with our neighbors and friends? How will we be the voice for the voiceless?

It is through the unexpected that God meets us. Are our eyes open so we can see? Or are we still too busy to take notice? May we all begin to dare to dream, to see the days when we can rejoice and celebrate again together. Let us envision the work out Lord has called us into and let us also keep our eyes open to where God continues to call us now and in this place and time so that we too can be like Simeon and Anna resting in the assurance of that which is to come. And when the promise comes may we testify and celebrate as Simeon and Anna. Amen